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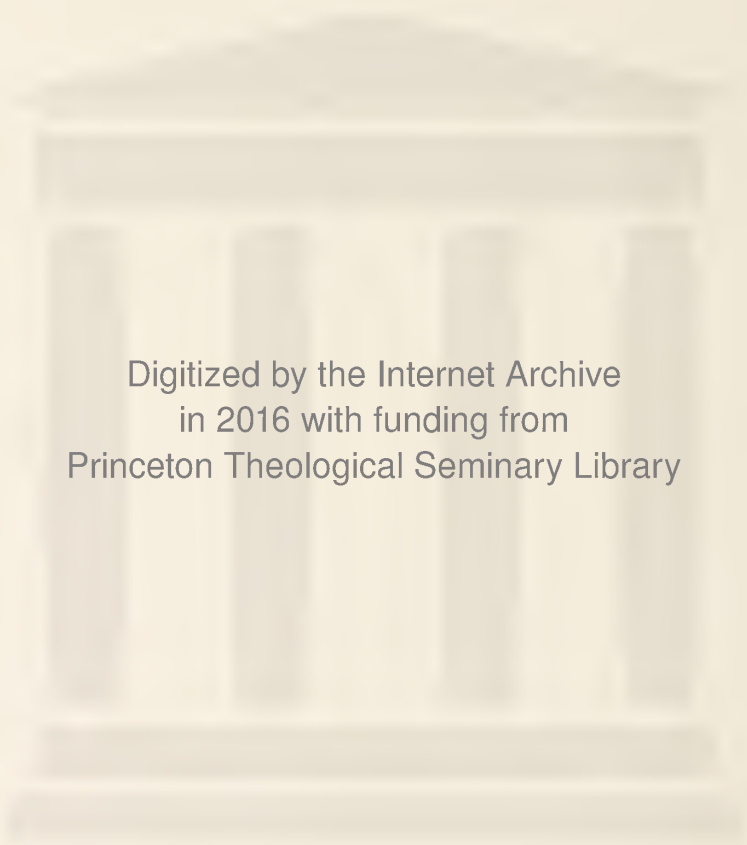


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# THE PRINCETON SEMINARY BULLETIN

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## Salute to Bruce M. Metzger

THE New Revised Standard Version of the Bible made its first appearance in bookstores late this spring. The result of sixteen years of labor by a committee of thirty scholars, the NRSV takes its place in the long tradition of English translations of the Bible. Among its illustrious predecessors are the King James Version (1611), the American Standard Version (1901), and the Revised Standard Version (1952).

NRSV committee members were an ecumenical group—Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish—and included both men and women. Their task was to provide a translation that would be as accurate as possible in the light of present scholarship, that would take into account new textual discoveries, that employed language that would be clear and readily understood without being colloquial or faddish, and that used inclusive language with reference to human beings. Two members of the committee were asked to contribute articles to this issue of the *Bulletin*. A brief history of the work of the committee is offered by Robert Dentan, while Walter Harrelson discusses how the committee approached the question of inclusive language.

Presiding over the work of the NRSV committee with characteristic fairness, decorum, and attention to detail was Bruce M. Metzger. A biblical scholar of international reputation, Dr. Metzger is well-known to most of the readers of this journal as the George L. Collord Professor Emeritus of New Testament Language and Literature at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Born in Middletown, Pa., Professor Metzger is a graduate of Lebanon Valley College. He received his M.Div. from Princeton Seminary and his Ph.D. from Princeton University. In 1938 he began teaching at Princeton Seminary and continued as a member of the faculty for the next forty-six years. Although Charles Hodge and William Henry Green are the record holders for Princeton Seminary faculty longevity with fifty-eight and fifty-two years of service respectively, it is probably safe to say that Bruce Metzger has taught more students than any other faculty member in the history of the Seminary. Author or editor of over twenty-five books, he has received a half dozen honorary degrees. He has served as President of the Society of Biblical Literature, the International Society for New Testament Study, and the North American Patristic Society. Twice he has been chosen to be a member of the prestigious Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. His array of academic accomplishments and honors rivals a concordance of the Bible in size.



If you ask Professor Metzger what is new about the NRSV, he will quote numerous instances of greater clarity, removal of ambiguity, elimination of archaisms, better euphony, and other improvements. He obviously enjoys citing texts where constrictive masculine renderings are weeded out, such as Mk. 8:34: "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (cf. RSV: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me"). He also calls attention to the removal of racist overtones in the new translation of Song of Solomon 1:5: "I am black and beautiful" (cf. RSV: "I am very dark, but comely").

Considering the time and energy he has devoted to the NRSV project, Dr. Metzger is remarkably free of a defensive spirit and readily acknowledges the limitations of the new translation. He knows far better than most that the task of translation is never-ending, and that there will come a time when a revision of the new revision will be necessary. He says he feels both relief and regret that the NRSV has been published, relief because it represents the completion of many years of work, regret because he wishes that there were more time to make further improvements.

In his brief essay "To the Reader" that introduces the new translation, Dr. Metzger sums up the primary goal of the committee in the following words: "The Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as a noble literary heritage of the past or who wish to use it to enhance political purposes and advance otherwise desirable goals, but to all persons and communities who read it so that they may discern and understand what God is saying to them. This message must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning. It is the hope and prayer of the translators that this version of the Bible may continue to hold a large place in congregational life and to speak to all readers, young and old alike, helping them to understand and believe and respond to its message."

We are happy to dedicate this issue to Bruce M. Metzger, Chair of the NRSV Committee and a distinguished New Testament scholar and teacher.

DANIEL L. MIGLIORE  
EDITOR



# The Story of the New Revised Standard Version

by ROBERT C. DENTAN

*Robert C. Dentan, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at General Theological Seminary in New York, is one of the two Vice-Chairs of the NRSV committee. His writings include: The Apocrypha: Bridge of the Testaments; Preface to Old Testament Theology; and The King and His Cross.*

SOME MODERN versions of the Bible lay special emphasis upon the fact that they are completely fresh translations, without ties to the conventions of the past. Good arguments can be advanced for that kind of approach. But however valid the arguments may be—and most of these versions are excellent in their own way—such is not the philosophy of the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), nor was it that of the old Revised Standard Version (RSV) on which it is based. In contrast, the committees that produced these versions are, or were, proud to stand in the direct line of descent from the earliest translation of the Bible into modern English, that of William Tyndale in 1534, and its “authorized” successor, the classic and beloved King James Version of 1611. In spite of all the changes that have been introduced, the NRSV is a revision, not a new translation of the Bible. The first revision of the standard English Bible was the (“English”) Revised Version of 1881-95; the second, the revision published by the American members of that revision committee in 1901 and called the American Standard Version (ASV); the third, the Revised Standard Version of 1946-57.

## I

When I was a student in Dean Luther A. Weigle’s class in American Church History at Yale Divinity School in the spring of 1930, and heard him speak, in his pleasantly enthusiastic way, of his hope that a revision of the ASV would soon be available that would both conserve its considerable virtues and correct its all-too-obvious faults, it could hardly have occurred to me that one day a revision of *that* revision would be published, and that I would be a member of the committee that produced it. This is how it happened. In 1929 the International Council of Religious Education, later to be merged into a department of the National Council of the Churches of Christ, had entrusted the work on a possible revision of the ASV into the hands of Dean Weigle and a representative committee of scholars. Such a revision seemed desirable both because of changing tastes in English style and the rapid advance of modern biblical scholarship, but also because of certain distinguishing marks of the ASV that hindered its wide acceptance

as a satisfactory successor to the universally admired KJV, in spite of the superior intelligibility of the ASV for the modern reader and its much greater accuracy in rendering the ancient Greek and Hebrew text.

The most obvious of these characteristics was the universal use in the Old Testament of the proper name "Jehovah," instead of "The LORD," to translate the Tetragrammaton, the Hebrew name of God. However correct this practice might be in scholarly theory—for the word in Hebrew is indeed a proper name, not a title—it was disastrous from the point of view of the liturgical, homiletical, and devotional use of the Bible, and was almost universally disliked. The other limiting feature of the ASV was a product of the same kind of over-meticulous scholarship. This was the attempt to reproduce not only the words but, as far as possible, the word-order of the original ancient text. The result was an English version that was frequently more awkward than even the KJV.

Dean Weigle's committee decided to revert to the use of "The LORD" to render the divine name, because the constant use of "Jehovah" grates on the ear, and it is not, in fact, an accurate representation of the mysterious name of the God of ancient Israel. The RSV's philosophy of language was, on the whole, conservative. The style of the ASV was modernized and its awkwardnesses smoothed over, but there was an effort to preserve something of the dignity and strength of the older English versions. Many passages, such as Psalm 23, were retained from the KJV without significant change. In prayers and other matters addressed to the deity even the archaic forms ("thou," "hast," etc.) were kept.

When the complete RSV was published in 1952 (the Apocrypha being added in 1957), it achieved wide acceptance in the churches except for a few very conservative groups that objected to the occasional use, in the Old Testament, of the ancient versions or modern scholarly conjectures to "correct" the traditional Hebrew text. Despite the general success of its endeavors, the committee was not content to remain idle. Far from regarding its work as complete, it continued in existence under Dean Weigle's presidency, and from time to time expanded its membership, both to maintain its existence in the face of inevitable deaths and resignations, and to broaden its representative character. (I became a member in the late 1950's.) Every two or three years, under call by the chair, the committee would meet for extended sessions to consider suggestions that had been made for the improvement of the version and on occasion to deal with extensive agenda that had been submitted by church bodies. Every proposal was carefully examined and filed for use in a possible future revision. Some minor changes were even-

tually made in the Old Testament, and a second edition of the New Testament appeared in 1971.

## II

Dean Weigle was one of those rare people who are vigorous and resilient at 90, but eventually, in 1966, it became necessary for someone else to assume the leadership of the committee. The new Chair was Prof. Herbert G. May of the Graduate School of Theology at Oberlin College in Ohio. With his accession to the office, the meetings of the RSV committee, which had previously met for the most part at Yale Divinity School, were transferred to the Oberlin campus, where they remained until Prof. May's tragic death in 1977 in an automobile accident.

In 1974 the National Council of Churches had authorized work to begin preparing a new revision of the Standard Bible which, it was optimistically hoped, would be ready for publication "sometime in the 1980's." One could hardly have believed that the preparatory work would last through that entire decade so that the actual publication date would be deferred to the fall of 1990.

The decision to produce a further revision of the RSV was basically due to the social changes that took place during the 60's and early 70's. One of these was the tendency, whether good or ill, toward less formality in social relationships, a relaxation of manner and dress that led inevitably to the use of a less formal style of language in public worship, sometimes almost to the point of colloquialization. Even in the stiffest of traditions it brought about the use of normal 20th century literary style in place of the archaic forms that had for many generations characterized the language of worship. What finally made this movement irresistible was the decision of the Roman Catholic Church to translate its Latin liturgy into English, and into current English rather than into an artificial liturgical style.

The RSV had already moved a long way in this direction by translating the Bible into contemporary English *except*, as was noted above, for speech addressed to God. In such passages (most of the Psalter, for example), the "thee's" and "thou's" were retained. For a full generation this had seemed a satisfactory compromise, as is evident from the fact that it was adopted for the New English Bible, when it was published in the late 60's and early 70's. But by the time the decision was reached to revise the RSV all were agreed that the middle way was not good enough. After all, the KJV made no distinction between speech to God and speech to human beings, and neither did the ancient languages in which the biblical books were originally writ-

ten. The RSV compromise had been a half-way step that demanded eventual completion; in the early 70's the time had obviously come for the committee to begin this necessary, though relatively mechanical task.

A second, and much more important, impetus for reconsidering the style of the RSV was given by the wide-spread demand that the English language be purged of what seemed to many "sex-biased" language, notably the word "man" in the so-called generic sense that covers both men and women, and the indefinite "he," referring to an antecedent that might be either male or female. Many other examples are easily found. There is a large constituency, even of women, that feels such concerns are trivial, but the leaders of the main-line churches, both men and women, are committed to the use of "inclusive language," as are most younger women and most publishers and educational organizations. The movement in that direction is increasing and is not likely to be reversed. For a committee of scholars this general tendency in modern language usage is strongly reinforced by the fact that the sex-biased forms are, for the most part, accidents of English style and are not supported by the ancient biblical languages.

All in all, the committee had no doubt that this was another compelling reason for re-examining the text of the RSV, although it would obviously require a great deal more effort than was involved in merely updating obsolete language. It should be noted, incidentally, that the committee was never seriously tempted to change the allegedly patriarchal terminology the Bible uses about God, such terms as "Father," "Lord," "King," etc., since these are inherent in the biblical text and in the thought-world of biblical times, not mere accidents of English style. The Bible is a historical document and the function of the scholar is to transmit the ancient text as faithfully as possible, not to adapt it to contemporary tastes. The whole subject of inclusive language in the NRSV is treated at length in another article in this issue, and therefore will not be further pursued here.

Once the need for modernizing the residual archaic forms in the RSV and of purging the language of sex-biased elements had been recognized, it was evident that the time was ripe for a further revision of the entire text, having in mind the incorporation into the Bible of the results of the committee's thinking about the problems of biblical translation over a whole generation and the conclusions of contemporary scholarship. Scholars are constantly engaged in studying matters that are relevant to a proper understanding of the meaning of biblical passages. From time to time new manuscript evidence comes to light, grammarians arrive at a new understanding of Greek or Hebrew constructions, social studies illuminate the context in



which ancient words were used, inscriptions and other discoveries in archaeological "digs" provide a new look at items in the Hebrew or Greek vocabulary, and scholars in library stacks get sudden flashes of insight that cause everyone to take a new look at passages they had always thought to be troublesome. The generally accepted conclusions of such study need to be incorporated in the biblical text for the edification of the general public. This provided a third motive for revising the RSV and gave the committee a third area in which to operate.

Even in the context of scholarship in the 40's and 50's, the original RSV was something of a compromise, as all "authorized" versions necessarily are. The 23rd psalm is a rather extreme illustration. In the RSV text the psalm appears essentially in its KJV form, but with footnotes that give alternative translations. In at least three of these instances scholars almost universally regarded the alternatives as preferable, but these were relegated to the margin while the familiar KJV language was retained in the text ("right paths" vs. "paths of righteousness"; "the valley of deep darkness" vs. "the valley of the shadow of death"; "as long as I live" vs. "for ever"). By the 70's this kind of deference to tradition was no longer necessary, especially since several new translations incorporating the marginal readings had already appeared. The committee now had the opportunity to bring the RSV into harmony with the best scholarship of the 70's and 80's.

The program was, therefore, this: to update grammatical forms, to eliminate sex-biased vocabulary, and to incorporate the results of sound biblical scholarship into the translation.

The schedule of the meetings was always the same. On a Sunday night the members would arrive in Oberlin, later Princeton, and have dinner together; then, Monday morning, promptly at 9 o'clock, the Chair would call the whole group together for a general meeting, beginning with a Bible reading and a prayer, to receive communications, to consider matters of general policy, and to address specific issues that had arisen since the previous meeting. A representative from the Department of Education and Ministry of the NCCC was always present to express its continuing interest in, and support for, the committee's work; the representative usually sat in with one of the working groups for the rest of the day, to observe what was being done. In view of the size of the agenda to be covered in any week, these general meetings were kept as brief as possible. At the conclusion of the business meeting, the committee broke into sub-groups for the Old Testament and New Testament. Later, as pressures to complete the job began to mount, the Old Testament committee was broken up into two, and finally

three, sub-groups. Eventually a sub-committee on the Apocrypha was added. Since this committee drew upon members from both Old Testament and New Testament, it usually met independently at a different time of year.

The sub-groups were exhausting for all the participants, who, though unpaid, were without exception deeply, often emotionally, concerned with every detail of the work being done and therefore constantly on the *qui vive*. Since the meetings lasted from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., everyone was thoroughly worn-out by the end of the week. Of course there were breaks: there was a lunch hour from 12 to 2 (later, after a heart-felt plea from one exhausted scholar, 2:30!) and a dinner hour from 5-7 p.m. A fifteen minute break was allowed at the half-way point of the morning and afternoon sessions, but for all practical purposes every day involved eight hours of concentrated intellectual work. It is a tribute to the character of the members that, in spite of the pressures everyone felt, the sessions were generally good-tempered—episodes marked by anger or irritation were exceedingly rare.

### III

The membership of the committee was structured so as to be as representative as possible. The NRSV was intended to be an ecumenical project. This would not have been possible in the climate of the 30's-50's when the original RSV was planned and produced; with the exception of one Jewish member, who was invited to join the Old Testament section only at a rather late stage (and is the only survivor of the original RSV committee to continue active on the NRSV), the old committee seems to have been resolutely main-line Protestant in affiliation. But the acceptance of the RSV by Roman Catholics in England, culminating in the publication of an official Catholic edition in 1966, in which the books of the Old Testament were arranged in the traditional Catholic order, supplemented by the Deuterocanonical books, opened the doors to genuine ecumenical collaboration. In 1973, the Collins Press issued an edition of the RSV entitled *The Common Bible*, in which the apocryphal books were placed between the Old Testament and New Testament, whereas the normal RSV order treated them as a supplement to the New Testament; and the Catholic Deuterocanonical books were distinguished, and printed separately, from the three additional books included in the standard Protestant collection of Apocrypha. In 1977 an expanded edition of *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, a study edition of the RSV, added 3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151 to the Apocrypha, three items that belong to the liturgical tradition of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This last

step made possible an edition of the NRSV that would be fully ecumenical both in content and preparation.

In accordance with the ecumenical perspective of the planning for the NRSV, the membership of the committee had been expanded to include Roman Catholic scholars, and the number of these tended to increase as the years passed, since they represented the largest single group of Christians in America. Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church, as an aspect of its revival of biblical studies generally, has produced a remarkable number of scholars of first-class ability. The Eastern tradition was represented by a leading scholar of the Greek Orthodox Church who served on both the New Testament and Apocrypha sub-committees. While, for obvious reasons, the Jewish community could not be expected to endorse any part of the NRSV, the presence of an eminent Jewish scholar on the Old Testament committee, participating as a full contributing member, was intended as both an expression of good-will and an assurance that the NRSV translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Christian Old Testament) would contain nothing offensive to our Jewish neighbors.

If, at the beginning, the NRSV committee was almost exclusively dominated by men (though there was one well-known woman scholar on the New Testament committee from the very start), this was not because the Chair was indifferent to the situation, but rather because the relative scarcity of women scholars made it difficult for some of those invited to join to accept the committee's invitation. Nevertheless, as time went on, the number of women members and their contributions became substantial.

Each of the sub-groups into which the Old Testament session was divided had its own presiding officer, at first the two Vice-Chairs; then, as the number of sub-groups expanded to three, their ranks were increased by a Chair pro-tem chosen from within the new group. Each Old Testament sub-group was assigned a graduate-student secretary who was responsible for keeping track of the issues discussed and the decisions reached. Inasmuch as the conduct of the discussions was very informal, the secretaries were generally encouraged to take part in them when they felt impelled to do so. Obviously, they had the longest working day of all, since much of their labor took place after hours.

The life of the committee naturally had a less serious side in the brief intervals between working sessions. Most of the members, like myself, looked forward to the opportunities presented by coffee breaks and meal-times to talk with friends and engage in lively discussions with people of similar interests. Arguments begun in working sessions were often contin-



ued over meals; inevitably, one must admit, conversations were concerned with matters irrelevant to the matters in hand, sport, politics, travel, cultural activities, even gossip (!). After the 9 o'clock adjournment there was still time for conviviality at a local restaurant or a visit to the last show at a local movie house. One of the inconveniences of the meetings at Oberlin was the limited opportunity for that kind of relaxation. The one year that Herbert May attempted to speed things up by having the committee meet for two successive weeks was never repeated, due to the energetic protests of one or two members who felt that two weeks in a town with only one picture show and practically no other opportunity for relaxing after work was one week too many.

#### IV

After Herbert May's death, the general oversight of the committee devolved on Prof. Bruce M. Metzger, Professor of NT at Princeton Theological Seminary, who had previously served as Chair only of the NT section. With his accession to the chair of the general committee, the venue of the meetings naturally shifted to Princeton, N.J., where it remained until the completion of the work, a period of about ten years. The sessions were housed at the Seminary's Center of Continuing Education, where the members had their living quarters, and in the seminar rooms of the school's library just across the street. This was a happy arrangement since the library shelves were able to provide an answer to almost any question, however recondite, that might arise during the course of deliberations.

The procedure for dealing with the separate books of the Bible was very simple. At least one member in each group was assigned a particular book for study, and for as much research as necessary. When the member's study was finished, he or she then drew up a detailed list of all the changes he or she felt were either necessary or desirable. These agendas were then discussed *seriatim*, each item being either accepted immediately (as many were, of course, being in accordance with previous decisions) or discussed until a consensus was reached. In rare instances, discussion of a single item could go on for an hour or two. If, finally, no consensus seemed possible, the issue was decided by simple majority vote. At the end of the week all the changes voted by all of the sub-committees, after further discussion when it seemed necessary, were ratified at a general meeting. Since the committee's work went on for some fifteen years, with many changes in personnel, a large number of the Old Testament books were reviewed a second time by another sub-committee, following an agenda prepared by yet another scholar,

since in the course of time the committee's understanding of its task had changed and matured; new general rules were formulated and the whole process of revision had become more thorough-going (some might say more radical) than had originally been envisaged.

The final stage in the process came when the work of the sub-committees was complete and the last book had been reviewed and re-reviewed. At this point the general committee voted to suspend operations and to elect an editorial committee, consisting of five persons, Prof. Metzger, as Chair both of the general committee and the New Testament section, plus two representatives from the New Testament sub-committee, and the two Vice-Chairs, both of whom represented the work on the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. Necessarily the two sub-committees (New Testament and Old Testament) met separately, with Prof. Metzger presiding at each. This editorial committee was given power to determine the final form of the text before publication. The Old Testament and New Testament sub-committees met for sessions lasting a week or ten days, frequently at two-month intervals, and made a final review of every verse and almost every punctuation mark in the entire Bible, looking for inconsistencies in general style and the rendering of individual words, endeavoring to pull the whole together so that the NRSV would seem a unified work, not simply a collection of discrete translations. The editorial committee was able to give thought to some matters, not strictly academic, which were of necessity largely passed over in the general committee, where pure scholarship tended to hold the floor. Inasmuch as the NRSV is sponsored by the National Council of Churches, it is intended for use in the services of the churches as well as for the private reading, study, and spiritual instruction of their members. For this reason attention needed to be given to the rhythm of sentences and the sound of words as they would be heard in public worship, and the general appropriateness of the text for a liturgical setting. Finally, since the NRSV was intended to be a revision of the RSV, not a new translation, it was important that it maintain, as far as is possible in modern English, the mood, tone, style, and uniform dignity of the KJV, which was the *original* Standard Bible.

As was said above, the work of the sub-committees covered three general areas: First was the comparatively simple procedure of removing "thee's" and "thou's" and the corresponding archaic verb forms. Generally speaking, this was the easiest task. Occasionally, however, some further adjustment had to be made. One insignificant example occurs in the Lord's prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven," mechanically corrected to modern style,

would produce "Our Father who are in heaven," which, though grammatically correct, would *sound* wrong to contemporary ears. Therefore the NRSV, like all other modern versions, simply omits the verbal copula and reads, "Our Father in heaven." It is true that this ignores one element in the Greek, the article, and has a more clipped, less resonant sound than the KJV, but such choices have to be made!

The second area to which attention had to be directed was that of insuring that the language was properly inclusive, so that no words intended by the original writer to refer to all human beings were translated by English words that might be understood to refer only to members of a single sex. The solution to these problems, which, in view of the peculiar nature of English, were often extremely difficult, was very time-consuming, since the resulting text had to sound like normal English, not some modish jargon. In only a tiny minimum of instances was the problem to prove insoluble—to us, at least. Two or three members of the committee, representing both the Old Testament and New Testament sections, resigned with the complaint that an inordinate amount of time was being spent on matters that seemed to them essentially trivial rather than on issues of substantial scholarly concern. The majority of the members, however, felt that the whole question was sufficiently important to warrant the time and effort spent upon it. Since another article in this issue deals with the subject at length, no more need be said about it here.

## V

By far the most important discussions centered not on more or less routine items like the removal of archaic language forms or the introduction of inclusive language, but on substantive matters that concerned the meaning of the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek and how this meaning is best expressed in modern literary English. In many cases the problem is the definition of a single word such as the Hebrew *ruach* or the Greek *pneuma*, either of which means both "wind" and "spirit." In the majority of instances the context makes the meaning clear, but in some passages such as Gen. 1:2 the context is completely neutral. Should one read with the KJV "the Spirit of God" or, with most modern versions, something like "a divine wind" or "a mighty wind," since no creative function is ascribed to the *ruach* and its presence seems merely an accompanying circumstance? The reading of the NRSV, after much discussion, is "a wind from God," which is the same as that of the New Jewish Version. No member of the committee would feel assured that this translation is definitive, but it seems at least closer to the

probable sense of the original Hebrew than the traditional rendering found in KJV and RSV (RSV, it should be noted, offered a similar meaning in a footnote).

One item that could provide almost a paradigm of the kind of problem of which we are speaking, although a much simpler one than the meaning of *ruach* in Gen. 1:2, is the word "blessed" that occurs in a well-known "wisdom" formula that is found in both the Old Testament and New Testament. In the "Good News Bible" (Today's English Version), these words are rendered uniformly "happy," as can be seen in Psalm 1:1 and Matt. 5:3-11, and some would argue that this is a more accurate translation everywhere, especially since neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word is derived from the verb "to bless." Even the KJV and RSV sometimes render the Greek word by "happy" (e.g., Rom. 14:22, 1 Cor. 7:40). But lexicographers argue that the Greek word *makarios*, in the classical form of the language, is used for that special happiness possessed by the gods and other divine beings, while a different word (*eudaimon*) describes the happiness enjoyed by ordinary human beings. The New Testament committee, in common with the translators of most other modern versions, opted to retain the word "blessed" in the Beatitudes and most other places. But the situation in Hebrew is altogether different in that the word *ashre* (actually a plural construct), which is translated "blessed" in KJV and RSV is the ordinary word for human happiness. So the OT committee voted to change "blessed" to "happy" wherever it translates *ashre*. (The word "blessed" as applied to God is an altogether different matter and translates quite different Hebrew and Greek words. In such passages, e.g., Psalm 144:1, NRSV, like all other versions, still reads "blessed." Rarely, the Hebrew word—*baruch*—is also applied to human beings, e.g., Ps. 118:26.)

A word that raises very difficult problems in translating the New Testament is the Greek *doulos*, which the classical Greek lexicon defines unequivocally "slave, or bondman." Nevertheless the KJV translated it 120 times as "servant": thus in Luke 2:29, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart . . .," a reading preserved *verbatim* in RSV. Many scholars, including some members of the NRSV committee, have argued that it should invariably be translated "slave," since other Greek words were available for "servant" if that had been the meaning intended. The counter-argument is that in Greco-Roman society slaves were often highly respected persons who could hold responsible positions in society, whereas in American society the connotations of the word are entirely negative, as indicated by the adjective "slavish," or such denigrating phrases as "wage slave," "slave of passion." It



is also true that in Old Testament Greek the word *doulos* can designate someone in high authority like Naaman of Syria (1 Kings 5:1, cf. vs. 6), and is used in other contexts in an obviously weakened sense. There are obviously good arguments on both sides of this issue and the final judgment had to be given by majority vote, which favored the retention of "servant" in such crucial passages as Luke 2:29, but with a new foot-note, "Gk *slave*."

These are just a few illustrations of the kind of complex problems the committee had to confront and the necessity of extended discussion to solve them. In other instances the data were of an entirely different character. Occasionally, for example, Old Testament passages have been illuminated by archaeological discoveries. A notable instance is found in the RSV at Gen. 14:15 where KJV-ASV describe God as "*possessor* of heaven and earth," but the RSV-NRSV text says "*creator* of heaven and earth." The change was based upon the discovery that in the ancient Canaanite language, as shown by the clay tablets found at Ras Shamra in Syria, the word *qanah*, which normally means "possess," once also had the meaning "create." Just such a discovery provides also the reason for an NRSV change in the text of Exod. 15:2, Psalm 118:14, and Isaiah 12:2, where both KJV and RSV read "The Lord is my strength and (my) *song*," a striking but rather unlikely coupling of ideas. It is now known, however, from inscriptions in ancient South Arabic (a dialect cognate with biblical Hebrew) that *zimrah*, which in biblical Hebrew usually means "song," could also mean something like "might" or "power." Furthermore, in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Exodus passage reads "my protector," which seems to point in the same direction. So, in the NRSV as in several other contemporary versions such as the New Jewish Bible, the line reads "The Lord is my strength and my *might*."

## VI

Most of the changes made are not the result of new discoveries or scholarly insights, but rather the application of common sense. For example, it is surprising to note in a concordance to the KJV or RSV that the word "city" appears about seven times more frequently than the word town. But it is obvious to anyone who has visited the country, or even thinks of the probabilities, that a very large proportion of these so-called cities are what we should call "towns"; Hebrew has words for "village" and "city," but no appropriate designation for the intermediate-sized "town." So the committee felt free to interpret the word "city" in accordance with what is known historically about the particular site. The Palestinian landscape, in conse-

quence, is considerably less crowded with large municipalities in the NRSV than in the older versions. Again, for the sake of greater accuracy, the "brook" Zered of Deut. 2:13, which is actually a canyon nearly 4000 ft. deep at its lower end, and is some 3-4 miles wide, in the NRSV has now become the "Wadi" Zered, and the word "wadi" has been introduced in numerous other places where it is clearly the exact word required. The conjunction "lest" has been largely, if not entirely eliminated from the NRSV vocabulary because some of us have discovered that even among college graduates many no longer understand its function. RSV Exod. 20:19, "let not God speak to us, lest we die" becomes in the NRSV, "do not let God speak to us, or we will die." In the KJV the word "animal" never appears; the only word used is "beast." The RSV slightly modernized by using "animal" in a few places, mostly having to do with laws concerning ritual purity. In the NRSV the situation is reversed and "animal" becomes the norm; "the beasts of the field" are now "the wild animals."

None of the changes made, I think, were made just for the sake of being modern, but rather for the sake of greater clarity and accuracy. The fact that our discussion in this article has been necessarily concentrated on examples of things that have been changed may suggest to the reader that the revision is much more sweeping than is in fact the case. Much of the older text remains basically the same. One would hope that the changes that have been made would commend themselves to all readers as reasonable and necessary. But such universal agreement is not likely. The members of the committee recognize that no work of this kind can be regarded as final or definitive. A later generation may feel that still further revision is necessary in the light of increasing knowledge and the changing mores and language-style of human society. But the committee has worked long and devotedly and hopes that, at the very least, the NRSV is not unworthy to stand in the great succession headed by the KJV and continued in the RSV.

# Inclusive Language in the New Revised Standard Version

by WALTER HARRELSON

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## I. GETTING STARTED

THE COMMITTEE responsible for producing the NRSV did not begin with a mandate to make the language inclusive. The decision was taken along the way, and in stages, as the work of the committee proceeded. Whether the initiative lay more within the committee than external to it, I am not able to say. The first formal statement on the subject is a sheet produced by the late George MacRae, S.J., containing guidelines for avoiding masculine language in cases in which it was clear that both men and women were intended. It was a modest statement indeed, and was soon outgrown, but it served us well for some sessions. I recall no extended discussion about avoiding masculine references to the deity, although the matter was reviewed as the draft common language lectionary was being produced, and the translation committee reaffirmed its decision not to attempt to eliminate masculine references to God.

But as the work proceeded, several committee members were quite unhappy with two matters. First, we had only one woman member of the committee, a fact that continued to trouble us. Efforts had been made in the 1970s, and perhaps earlier, to secure the assent of women scholars to serve on the committee, but without success. On one occasion, probably around 1980, committee members at a business session of the entire committee proposed that we invite *several* women scholars at once and see if we could secure acceptances in that way. The plan succeeded, and several women scholars joined the committee during the next few years. Their presence gave additional incentive to the effort to eliminate more of the masculine language than our draft translations had done to that point, although not all of the women scholars held identical positions on this matter.

The second concern was how much masculine language was being retained in our draft translations. Could we not eliminate more of it and still remain by our mandate to revise the RSV only where it was necessary to do so? What tactics were available that we might not yet have tried? The usual approach was taken: a small committee was appointed to take some partic-



ularly difficult texts and see what could be done to reduce or eliminate the masculine references. The texts chosen were Exodus 21-23, the so-called Covenant Code, and Joshua 20, one of the accounts of the establishment of cities of refuge. The committee did its work primarily by correspondence, with an exchange of drafts of the two passages. The proposed changes were not greatly different from what we now have in the NRSV, but when they were presented to the entire committee, it was clear that they were not acceptable at all. To eliminate the "his" in such legislation as "Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death" (Exod. 21:15) was considered too radical, and making the sentence plural clearly would not work. (Later, of course, we frequently introduced the plural.) And in any case, legal language, it was pointed out, is conventional, stereotyped language, well understood by the community to apply to all, but necessarily put in fixed, conventional terms. It would be bad precedent indeed to begin to modify the Bible's legal language in such a way as was proposed. What we needed was greater precision in the use of this stereotypical language, a precision that was being helped along by the many specialist studies of ancient Near Eastern and biblical law. We would only introduce confusion when clarity was urgently needed.

The same was said about the revision of the cities-of-refuge text. There, the draft had proposed that we use "the slayer" and "the victim," and the like, in place of using the pronoun "he" so often. It seemed to the drafters of the proposal that these changes made things much clearer, for they identified the parties much more precisely. But the time was not ripe for such a change, and the draft proposals were voted down. The full committee indicated its desire not to try to make the legal language of the Bible sex-inclusive, although I believe no formal vote to that effect was taken.

Thereafter, the several groups working on the Hebrew Bible, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament simply worked out their own approaches, sharing them over meals and in general discussion with other groups, and a consensus built up over the remaining years that we could and must eliminate masculine language that was not clearly intended to refer only to males. A number of strategies were devised for doing so, and the result is reflected in the NRSV. The two small editorial committees that went through the entire text (one for the Hebrew Bible and the Apocrypha and one for the New Testament) were charged to catch the remaining omissions that could be cared for and to smooth out, to the extent possible, the varied practices of the several groups.

## II. THE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE POLICY

The policy that developed over the last decade of the committee's life finally came to have the assent of all members, in my judgment. That policy was quite simple: the committee should remove all masculine language in referring to human beings apart from those texts that clearly referred to men. In order to do so, the committee adopted a number of agreed conventions, chief among them the use of the plural instead of the singular, even in some instances in which the committee believed that only males were involved ("My child" for "My son" in Proverbs, for example). It was agreed that we would not use "persons" or "people," unless no alternative could be found. We would use "one" or "someone" as necessary, but sparingly. When a Psalmist was referring to an enemy, we would retain the "he" or "his," since otherwise we would be losing the vivid, personal force of the psalm. Certain critical texts, such as those that employed "son of man" for humankind, were at first handled on an ad hoc basis, but as the work proceeded those, too, began to be eliminated. Ezekiel's many references to the prophet as "son of man" (Hebrew *ben 'adam*) were translated "O mortal" or "mortal," a happy solution, we thought, since Ezekiel is clearly stressing the prophet's humanity in contrast with God's transcendent glory and authority.

Daniel's "son of man" was treated differently, since there the Aramaic "one like a human being," which was the translation adopted, clearly means just that. The New Testament references, however, retain Son of Man.

Have the translators been consistent in their application of the policy? They have been quite successful, on the whole, with the result that readers now have a largely inclusive-language translation that can easily be made more inclusive even as one reads from the lectern or pulpit. Let me illustrate and make some comments about particularly troublesome cases.

Psalm 8 is a quite good instance of the principle of making texts inclusive by the use of the plural pronoun. I begin with v. 3:

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
     the moon and the stars that you have established,  
 what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
     mortals that you care for them?  
 Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
     and crowned them with glory and honor . . .

It is unmistakable that these plurals express more clearly, for contemporary English readers, the sense of the Hebrew text than singular pronouns would express that sense. And in this instance the use of the plural for the Hebrew terms *'enosh* and *ben 'adam* just as well renders the meaning as would "man" and "son of man," unless one is interpreting the psalm to have reference to Israel's divinized earthly king, as some scholars still do.

The problem of how to quote this text in the New Testament is solved by simply using the language for "man" and "son of man" that had been used in the Hebrew text. The Greek is given in footnotes, along with an additional note to the effect that the terms "man" and "son of man" in the Hebrew text refer to all humankind. I wonder, today, if we could not have made that footnote clearer, since we do not in fact have "man" and "son of man" in the translation of the Hebrew psalm!

Another good example of the committee's practice, involving more change, occurs in the translation of Psalm 41. There we decided to translate some direct speech as indirect speech so as to make the text inclusive. Instead of translating, "My enemies say in malice, 'When will he (i.e., the Psalmist) die, and his name perish?'" we translate, "My enemies wonder in malice when I will die, and my name perish." And again, in v. 8, we have, "They think that a deadly thing has fastened on me, that I will not rise again from where I lie," for the direct quotation, "They say, 'A deadly thing has fastened on him; he will not rise again from where he lies.'" Such a change could be criticized for diminishing the concreteness and vividness of the Psalmist's language, but I believe that little has been lost in our rendering.

But we were not able to make all the language inclusive (and neither were our colleagues who translated the New Testament). In the translation of Psalm 109, for example, we finally agreed that we would have to let some masculine references remain, since otherwise the Psalmist's enemy could not adequately be depicted in contrast to the Psalmist. Note v. 6, where we have introduced the words, "They say," in order to make it clear that it is the Psalmist's accuser who calls down the terrible curse on the Psalmist, not the other way around (vv. 7-19). The Psalmist's prayer resumes at verse 20, where the language is once more inclusive. But the Psalmist has been *necessarily* identified as male, it would appear, though we *could* have translated, "They call for a wicked person to be appointed against me; for an accuser to stand on my right." When I am tried, let me be found guilty . . . , and so on—following the device used in Psalm 41.

The fact is that we tried that approach, but the farther we proceeded, the more complicated matters got. See, for example, v. 17: "I loved to curse,

they said; let curses come on me," It was too much, with the result that we gave up on Psalm 109 and left the Psalmist identified as masculine.

One happy discovery was that Psalm 131 is translated in such a way as to suggest that the author is a woman, not a man. See especially v. 2 which now reads at the end: "... my soul is like the weaned child that is with me." This is surely a precise translation of the Hebrew, and following upon the preceding line, "... like a weaned child with its mother ...," strongly suggests that a mother is speaking.

Colleagues in the New Testament committee gave up, it seems evident, on texts such as Mt. 7:24-27, probably because they too saw that concreteness and vividness would also be damaged there. They read, "... like a wise man who built his house upon a rock," and "... like a foolish man who built his house on sand." In this case, moreover, the builder is so likely to have been male that one might argue that it would have been inappropriate to eliminate the masculine reference. The same may be true of Mt. 5:25, where the text still reads, "Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him ..." I would have preferred there to see, however, "... while the two of you are on the way to court. ..."

### III. INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE THAT WORKS PARTICULARLY WELL

Let me now offer some instances of inclusive language that in my judgment the translators have handled particularly well. In the New Testament, I single out several instances from 1 Cor. and elsewhere that I think are praiseworthy. Beginning at 1:10 and throughout the epistle, "brothers" has very often become "brothers and sisters," with a note that indicates that the Greek reads "brothers." Other instances of "brothers" in the Greek need to be translated otherwise. For example, in 1 Cor. 14:26, "my brothers" becomes "my friends," as it does also in 14:39. But in 6:6, "brother" and "brothers" have become "... a believer goes to court against a believer." The changes for the sake of inclusiveness once again give us more precise and accurate translations than would the mere rendering of the normal meaning of the Greek.

In other places, both the New Testament and the Old Testament committees have rendered "brother" by "neighbor," or "kin," a good solution in many instances, although there are distinct Hebrew and Greek words for "neighbor," and readers could suppose, were there not a note, that the Hebrew or Greek has the usual word for "neighbor." Numerous instances of this kind of inclusive translation occur. See, for example, Mt. 7:3, "... the



speck in your neighbor's eye," and Lev. 19:17, "You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin." When "kin" or "kinsfolk" is chosen for "brother" or "brothers," frequently no note is given.

For "man" or "men," many different solutions are found. In 1 Cor. 1:25, NRSV reads, "For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." Gen. 9:6 reads, "Whoever sheds the blood of a human/ by a human shall that person's blood be shed;/ for in his own image/ God made humankind." That limps quite a bit poetically, though the committee trying to revise that little poem worked hours on it—but at that point we had not quite hit our stride in discovering inclusive language. The use of "others" is often a successful solution; see Mt. 6:1, "Beware of practicing your piety before others. . . ." We also use "one" and "anyone" very frequently.

In Acts 2 it would have been possible to have treated 2:14 in the way that 2:22 is treated, reading the first passage "You that are Judeans" instead of "Men of Judea," just as 2:22 is read—"You that are Israelites." Similarly, in Gen. 2:7, we could have read "... then the LORD God formed a man . . ." instead of "then the LORD God formed man." I fear that there may be a considerable number of other instances in which we simply overlooked places where the text could have been made inclusive.

But let me now quote a few passages in which the committees were able to come through with particularly felicitous readings. I mentioned earlier that we had worked through one version of the establishment of the cities of refuge. Let us read portions of Josh. 20 to see how well we managed:

Then the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying, "Say to the Israelites, 'Ap-  
point the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you through Moses, so  
that anyone who kills a person without intent or by mistake may flee  
there; they shall be for you a refuge from the avenger of blood. The  
slayer shall flee to one of these cities and shall stand at the entrance of  
the gate of the city, and explain the case to the elders of that city; then  
the fugitive shall be taken into the city, and given a place, and shall  
remain with them. And if the avenger of blood is in pursuit, they shall  
not give up the slayer, because the neighbor was killed by mistake,  
there having been no enmity between them before.

One can see that the parties are very well identified, that the language is inclusive, and that even if it should have been the case that women did not use the institution of cities of refuge, the language does not falsify that fact, and the language is inclusive.

The Sermon on the Mount also has excellent instances of inclusivity. See, for example, Mt. 6:24:

No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

The saying about the rich (Mt. 19:23-24) is also handled well:

Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.

Job 3 is another instance in which the translators produced a smooth reading:

Why is light given to one in misery?  
and life to the bitter in soul,  
who long for death, but it does not come  
and dig for it more than for hidden treasures;  
who rejoice exceedingly,  
and are glad when they find the grave?

Is. 2:17 may be a bit less satisfactory:

The haughtiness of people shall be humbled,  
and the pride of everyone shall be brought low.

#### IV. REMAINING PROBLEMS

But problems clearly remain. Have we adequately addressed the language that gives trouble and offense to others who take exception to certain forms of reference? We have eliminated "dumb" in favor of "speechless" or the like, and we have rarely used the term "leper" but have referred to persons with "a leprous disease," with a note indicating that several kinds of skin disease are covered by the biblical term often translated "leprosy." But we probably are on the threshold of new forms of reference to persons with handicapping conditions, and it will be wise now to begin to collect references that can be used in a forthcoming revision.

More critical are such terms for the deity as "Lord," which the NRSV has put in small capital letters when the personal name for the deity,

YHWH, appears in the text. We did not consider long enough, perhaps, the question whether there might be a more suitable term than "Lord" for the Tetragrammaton. We did briefly consider the term chosen by James Moffatt in his translation of the Bible, "the Eternal," but there was no real support for its adoption. We talked of using "the Sovereign," but that seemed no more suitable than "the Lord." We needed "the Creator" for those occurrences of just that term in the Hebrew. Finally, since we found no better alternative for "the Lord," we let that familiar term stand.

We were in agreement that we should not eliminate all the personal pronouns for the deity, though we did find that often we could reduce the number of such pronouns by simply eliminating those that seemed unnecessary. I find that readers are actually in a rather good position with the NRSV to make such adjustments in public reading as they think appropriate, now that the unnecessary masculine references to human beings have been so widely removed. It is a genuine pleasure, as I have had occasion to discover, to be able to read the lessons appointed for the day in such a way as to eliminate entirely masculine references to the deity, and to do so without having had to retranslate or reproduce the biblical lessons. With only a little practice and with nothing but the NRSV in hand, we can hear an English rendering of the NRSV lessons from Tanakh and Psalter, from Epistle and Gospel, that is genuinely inclusive.

The NRSV has its flaws. Numerous readings are not what one or more of the translators would have preferred. No doubt there are mistakes, instances of lack of consistency, infelicities of expression, and perhaps some howlers. But on the basis of my re-examination of considerable portions of the text I would judge that it is by far our most inclusive Bible, the one best suited for public reading among all the newer translations, and (as will be indicated elsewhere in this issue) our most accurate available English Bible. That is a very great deal indeed, and we have the translators, and our Princeton Seminary colleague Bruce Metzger in particular, to thank for this achievement.



# The Pilgrim Bible on a Feminist Journey

by PHYLLIS TRIBLE

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FEMINIST interpretation of the Bible is not monolithic. Never has it been and never will it be. The endeavor holds tensions, even contradictions, and no one can pontificate about it. To each her own, a voice; to each her own, a view; to each her own, a vision. Yet individual and culturally differentiated words may yield isolation. *That* also is not feminism but rather betrayal of it. From teaching, testing, and talking I perceive certain trends in the diverse efforts to redeem scripture from patriarchal confines. So in tracing my journey, I voice concerns of others.

## I

The story began in the early 1970's. Listening to animated discussions about feminism, I did not have to be converted but realized it was bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. At the same time, I also understood that scripture nourished my life; that the Bible I grew up with in Sunday School, where sword drills were routine and memory verses mandatory, continued to feed me. To be sure, I had learned in college and graduate school that scripture differs from what the church taught about it, but never did critical scholarship diminish my love for it. There is power in the document, and it need not work adversely for women or for men. This I knew and this I know, no matter how much others say it is not so.

But there was the rub. A feminist who loves the Bible produces, in the thinking of many, an oxymoron. Perhaps clever as rhetoric, the description offers no possibility for existential integrity. After all, if no man can serve two masters, no woman can serve two authorities, a master called scripture and a mistress called feminism. And so my predicament grew as I heard the challenge: Choose ye this day whom you will serve, the God of the fathers or the God of sisterhood. Biblical religion is the God of the fathers; in it is no resting place for a feminist. If this assertion were true, then I was of all

women most wretched (or whatever adjective seems fitting: confused, schizophrenic, misguided, conservative, and just plain wrong).

## II

That predicament has spurred rewarding study. It posits an indisputable statement, an overwhelming observation, and a description and condemnation all rolled into one. The Bible was born and bred in a land of patriarchy; it abounds in male imagery and language. For centuries interpreters have exploited this androcentrism to articulate theology, to define the church, synagogue, and academy, and to instruct human beings, female and male, in who they are, what roles they should play, and how they should behave. So harmonious has seemed this association of scripture with sexism, of faith with culture, that few have ever questioned it. Understandably, then, when feminism turns attention to the Bible, it first of all names patriarchy. To name means more than affixing a label. To name is to analyze and also to indict. The Bible promotes the sin of patriarchy. Though both Testaments come under censure, I work here within my scholarly domain of the First Testament (traditionally known among Christians as the Old Testament).

A feminist reader observes the plight of the female in ancient Israel. Less desirable in the eyes of her parents than a male child, a girl remained close to her mother, but her father controlled her life until he relinquished her to another man in marriage. If either of these male authorities permitted her to be violated, she had to submit without recourse. Thus Lot offered his daughters to the men of Sodom to protect a male guest (Gen. 19:8); Jephthah sacrificed his daughter to remain faithful to a foolish vow (Judg. 11:29-40); Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (II Sam. 13); and the Levite from the hill country of Ephraim participated with other males to bring about the betrayal, rape, torture, murder, and dismemberment of his own concubine (Judg. 19). Although not every story involving female and male is so terrifying, nevertheless, the narrative literature makes clear that from birth to death the Hebrew woman belonged to men. They ruled her life.

What such narratives show, the legal corpus amplifies. Defined as the property of men (Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21), women did not control their own bodies. A man expected to marry a virgin, though his own virginity need not be intact. A wife guilty of earlier fornication violated the honor and power of both father and husband. Death by stoning was the penalty (Deut. 22:13-21). Moreover, a woman had no right to divorce (Deut. 24:1-4) and, most often, had no right to own property. Excluded from the priesthood,

she was deemed far more unclean than the male (Lev. 15). And her monetary value was less (Lev. 27:1-7).

### III

Evidence abounds for the subordination, inferiority, and abuse of women. One has no difficulty in making this case against the Bible; it is the *sine qua non* of all feminist readings. Yet this recognition has led to different conclusions. Some people renounce scripture as hopelessly misogynous, a woman-hating document with no health in it. Some reprehensibly use the patriarchal data to support anti-semitic sentiments. They maintain that ascendancy of the male god Yhwh demolished an historic (or prehistoric) era of good goddess worship. A Christian variety of this view holds that whereas the "Old" Testament falters badly, the "New" Testament brings improved revelation. Other individuals consider the Bible to be an historical document devoid of continuing authority and hence worthy of dismissal. The "who cares?" question often comes at this point. In contrast, others despair about the ever present male power that the Bible and its commentators promote. And still others, unwilling to let the case against women be the determining word, insist that text and interpreter provide a more excellent way. Thereby they seek to redeem the past (an ancient document) and the present (its continuing use) from the confines of patriarchy.

This last approach is my niche. Combining scriptural critique and feminist perspective shapes a hermeneutic that makes a difference. It begins with suspicion and becomes subversion. The goal is healing, wholeness, joy, and well-being.

Reinterpretation characterizes this hermeneutic. It recognizes the polyvalency of the text but does not make the Bible say anything one wants. Between a single meaning and unlimited meanings lies a spectrum of legitimate readings. Some assert themselves forcibly; others have to be teased out. Reinterpretation also recognizes diversity. Despite attempts at harmonization by ancient redactors and modern critics, the Bible remains full of conflicts and contradictions. It resists the captivity of any one perspective. Even the winners who prevail bear witness to the losers. In the process of being discredited, they receive canonical status. Understanding that every culture contains a counter-culture, feminism seeks these other voices in scripture. Reinterpretation exploits diversity and plurality.

Furthermore, it emphasizes the pilgrim character of scripture. The Bible wanders through history, engaging in new settings and ever refusing to be locked in the box of the past. Every generation and group who meet the text

hold perspectives not adopted by others, and discuss issues not raised by others. One group seeks what another did not. Each sees in part, not in whole. So this pilgrim book has maintained a lively dialogue with generations of readers, for weal or woe. Feminist reinterpretation respects the historical, sociological, political, and existential journeys of scripture.

#### IV

The familiar story in Genesis 2-3 illustrates reinterpretation. For centuries exegetes have used this text to legitimate patriarchy as the will of God. Their powerful exposition has burrowed its way into the collective psyche of the Western world. We think we know what the text says. Major assertions include:

God creates man first and woman last.

The order subordinates her to him.

She is derivative, having come from his side.

She is his helper, his assistant, not his equal.

She is the seducer, the one blamed for disobedience.

God curses her.

God punishes her through subjection to the will of her husband.

All feminists who hold this exegesis ironically mouth the patriarchal reading. Consequently, they must denounce and reject the story.

But that is not the response of this feminist. Long ago I asked myself: How come, if the story is so terribly patriarchal, I like it? How come it nourishes my life? How come I feel no anger in reading it? No embarrassment in claiming it? How come it gives me a sense of well-being in spite of its tragic ending? In first pondering these questions, I sensed another meaning must be available. To articulate it became the challenge. Sometime after that, fragments of thought began to surface. I remembered the Southern Baptist missionary who, having returned from foreign lands many years ago, was teaching Bible study to a group of G.A.'s, as we were called. (G.A.'s means Girls' Auxiliary; the corresponding boys' group was known as R.A.'s, Royal Ambassadors!) This woman said, "Girls, everything that God created got better and better. What was the last thing God created?" In unison and with vigor, we replied immediately, "Man." And she said, "No, woman." Though hers is not the precise exegesis I now espouse, nonetheless to this day I am grateful for her insight. It resonated deeply within, though at the time I knew it not.

Years later I was sitting in a classroom at Union Theological Seminary.

The course was Old Testament Theology; the professor, a learned scholar but hardly a feminist. With great detail, he exegeted the story of the Garden. All that he said I fervently recorded. In the years that followed I seldom checked those notes. Then one day another fragment of thought surfaced. I sought out the notes, and there it was. The professor had said something like this: "The portrayal of the man in the garden is not the portrayal of a patriarch. Whereas the woman is depicted as alert, intelligent, and sensitive, the man comes off as passive, bland, and belly-oriented." Surely enough, as I reread I saw that the woman contemplates the fruit, finding it good to eat (a physical concern), pleasant to see (an aesthetic dimension) and desirable for wisdom (a sapiential motif). Her vision encompasses the gamut of life. Only then does she eat. By contrast, the man *who was with her* (a telling phrase deleted by translators going all the way back to Jerome) simply ate. How thankful I am for that insight from the lips of a patriarchal professor. He knew not what he was doing, but at some deep level his exposition resonated with feminist flesh and bones.

In due season a third memory surfaced. It pertained to an obscure footnote by a male writer who at the time knew nothing of feminism. He observed that the world's first statement of patriarchy, "Your desire is for your man, but he rules over you" (Gen. 3:15), comes not in the context of creation but of disobedience and judgment. Could it be, he asked, that some theologian in ancient Israel questioned male dominance? For that footnote I am also grateful.

These and other fragments of thought emerged after years of lying dormant. They helped me reinterpret Genesis 2-3 from a feminist perspective. (See *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*.) Such exegesis counters tradition in reading the text as critique, not legitimation, of patriarchy. The polyvalency of the text, the challenge of feminism, an existential awareness, gifts from the past, hints and guesses—these convergencies made possible a new understanding. Let me say simply and confessionally: all this happened because of the goodness of God.

## V

Interpreting the Bible with a feminist hermeneutic does not mean, however, that every text turns out to be less or non-patriarchal. In some cases, analysis shows how much more patriarchal a passage is. The challenge to redeem scripture must then be met differently from my handling of the creation account. *Texts of Terror* illustrates this procedure. It focuses on Hagar, Tamar, an unnamed woman, and the unnamed daughter of Jephthah.



Throughout history they have received scant attention. While the establishment prefers to forget its use and abuse of women, feminism wrestles with the meaning of it all. To accord these stories happy endings would be preposterous; yet to succumb to their suffering would be destructive. The demanding task is to retell them on behalf of the victims. In undertaking this project, I have endeavored not just to expose misogyny and certainly not to perpetuate crime but rather to appropriate the past in a dialectic of redemption. Reinterpretation remembers is order not to repeat. Its memorial calls for repentance.

## VI

If over the centuries patriarchal exegesis has neglected threatening passages, we need not assume that they are all texts of terror demeaning to women. To the contrary, they may be signs of female strength, hints of a women's tradition that redactors could not entirely squelch. Such a series of texts currently occupies my research. It centers in the Exodus traditions.

So eager have interpreters been to get Moses born that they pass quickly over the pericopes that lead to his advent (Ex. 1:8-2:10). We know that "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph"; he dealt harshly with the Hebrew people; the more he oppressed them, the more they multiplied and threatened him; finally he issued an order to kill their newborn sons. These things we have all heard, but we have failed to underscore the irony of royalty duped by midwives. What delight Israel must have had in telling the story! The mighty king of Egypt, Pharaoh of the Two Lands, male god incarnate, deigned to speak directly to females. Moreover, memory preserved their names, Shiprah and Puah, while obliterating the identity of the monarch so completely that he has become the burden of innumerable doctoral dissertations. These women were the first to oppose Pharaoh openly. Acting alone, with no advice, assistance, or instructions from males, they thwarted the will of the oppressor. Surely the names Shiprah and Puah belong in any litany of the courageous and faithful.

What they began, other females continued. A woman "conceived and bore a son and when she saw how good he was, she hid him three months. And when she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes . . . and she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds at the river's bank." His unnamed sister "stood at a distance to know what would be done to him" (Ex. 2:2). Her presence demonstrates that, contrary to patriarchal innuendo, Moses was not the first-born. In quiet and secret

ways defiance continued as mother and sister schemed to save their baby son and brother.

This portrait enlarges with the opportune appearance of the daughter of Pharaoh, accompanied by her maidens. The phrase "daughter of Pharaoh" captures the tension in the situation. Like Shiprah and Puah, like the mother and sister, she too is a woman. But unlike them, she belongs to the oppressor. How will the daughter of *Pharaoh* respond to illegal acts of female slaves on behalf of life? Instructing her maid to fetch the basket, the princess opens it, sees a crying baby, and opens her heart to him even as she recognizes his Hebrew identity. She draws him out of the water, thereby becoming herself the first deliverer of the Hebrew people. She models for Moses his forthcoming role. The daughter of Pharaoh aligns herself with the daughters of Israel. She breaks filial allegiance, crosses clan lines, and obliterates racial and political differences. The sister, having seen it all from a distance, dares to suggest the perfect arrangement: a Hebrew nurse for the baby boy, specifically the child's own mother.

After these distaff beginnings, the story turns to Moses. He must demand that Pharaoh let Israel go. If Pharaoh refuses, then God will slay the first-born son of the Egyptian monarch. The threat is followed, however, by an obscure story in which Moses himself is almost slain (Ex. 4:24-26). Impossible to decipher, the report features a nocturnal visitor, perhaps a deity, seeking to kill. Moses seems to be in mortal danger because he has not been circumcised. This time the deliverer is his wife Zipporah. She saves him from death. Having begun with women, the Exodus story advances by the quick thought and action of another female. But again the women's story disappears as Moses, Pharaoh, and God struggle through the plagues and the sea crossings. After the strife is o'er and the battle done, Israel celebrates the victory won. Moses leads the sons of Israel in singing a long litany of triumph (Ex. 15:1-18).

How puzzling, then, is the text that follows (Ex. 15:19-21). It focuses on Miriam and the women of Israel. She leads them in a brief song of victory that repeats with variations the first stanza of the litany attributed to Moses. The repetition suggests that her contribution is derivative and his original. Further, though he can sing an entire song, she can remember, and then not perfectly, only the first stanza. By comparison, her performance seems deficient as does this small concluding unit that awkwardly follows the grand Mosaic ending.

Ironically, explanations for the two endings (by scholars who can never be accused of a feminist bias!) diminish Moses and highlight Miriam. They



maintain that, in the presence of a Mosaic avalanche, retention of the Miriamic conclusion argues for its antiquity and authority. So tenacious was the tradition about Miriam that redactors could not eliminate it. In fact, once upon an early time, before editors got jobs, the entire Song of the Sea, not just the first stanza, was ascribed to Miriam and the women of Israel. Later, those intent upon elevating Moses took the song right out of her mouth and gave it to him. Unable to squelch the more ancient tradition, they appended it in truncated form to their preferred version (Ex. 15:20-21). As a result, the end of the Exodus story, like the beginning, belongs to women. They are the alpha and omega, the 'aleph and taw, of deliverance. Such signs of strength indicate a women's tradition that can be teased out of patriarchal moorings.

## VII

I stop here, but for sure the story is not finished. There are miles to go in exegesis and appropriation. At times, travel is difficult and dangerous. Like Jeremiah, I sense that enemies are around to reproach and denounce. At other times, the journey is fun. I know the joy of discovery, wholeness, and well-being. Where will it all end? In my eschatological vision we move toward a theology of gender redemption, the healing of female and male. Upon arrival, the pilgrim Bible on a feminist journey will have returned us to creation in the image of God, a consummation devoutly to be sought.

# Confrontations in the Book of Amos

by DAVID NOEL FREEDMAN

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THE PURPOSE of this study is to examine the structure of chap. 7 of the book of Amos and to see how the arrangement of the parts affects our understanding and interpretation of the contents. Actually we are concerned with the account of the first four visions in the book of Amos and these are described in chaps. 7-8 (7:1-8:3), although it is clear that they form a distinctive unit in the larger book (divisions confirmed in the oldest and best medieval MSS of the Massoretic Text).

## I

The basic pattern is fairly simple and clear enough to command a consensus among scholars dealing with the matter, although there are numerous questions concerning details of the arrangement and also the boundaries of the minor divisions in the unit. One major consideration of structure remains and that concerns the account of the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah the (chief) priest at the shrine (= temple) in Bethel, a major if not the major cult center in the northern kingdom. This intrusion in the otherwise orderly sequence of the first four visions (the 5th is somewhat distinct or separate and is described in chap. 9:1-6) fills vv. 10-17 in chap. 7, and occurs between the 3rd and 4th visions, which produces an additional oddity or anomaly by itself. In view of the fact that the visions clearly occur in pairs, each pair having a distinctive pattern, one might have expected that an intrusion, especially a planned one, would have occurred between the two pairs of visions rather than between the elements of a single pair.

So the cultural question arises out of a prior assumption or presupposition, namely: as the order and arrangement of the first four visions is both formulaic and carefully calibrated, is or isn't this unrelated story of Amos and his confrontation with Amaziah out of place and should it not be analyzed and evaluated separately from the visions? Admittedly there is a link between the 3rd vision and the confrontation, exemplified by v. 9 which

forms a kind of transition from one paragraph to the other. The best MSS clearly associate v. 9 with vv. 6-8, thus making its content part of the account of the 3rd vision, but at the same time the content of the verse, with its explicit reference to the "sword" and the "house of Jeroboam," relates directly to the substance of the confrontation between priest and prophet, namely the supposed conspiracy against the house of Jeroboam.

It is our contention that not only is the arrangement of parts, including the account of the confrontation at Bethel as well as the story of the four visions, deliberate, but that close study of the connections and implications will provide new and additional insights into the mission of the prophet and the nature of the circumstances and situation in which the prophet and the priest found themselves. In brief, we hold that there are two accounts of confrontations, one between prophet and priest and the other between prophet and God, and that they are deliberately juxtaposed, not because they proceed simultaneously (which would be a possibility at least) but because one set of circumstances influences the other, and the somewhat unusual behavior of the prophet in the confrontation at Bethel can be understood and is explained by the former and much more decisive confrontation already experienced by the prophet. In other words, the confrontation at Bethel and its outcome are put carefully and deliberately in the framework of the inaugural and continuing visions of the prophet, because the latter not only affected the interchange with Amaziah but shaped and influenced the outcome. Furthermore, the placement of the Bethel narrative in the sequence of visions is itself carefully considered and not erroneous or accidental, but deliberate and intentional and significant. In short, it comes at precisely the right point in the sequence of visions, and it not only provides information about the central importance and significance of the visions, but is itself informed and elucidated by the account of the visions. So one confrontation affects the outcome of the other and together they provide a vivid picture of an extraordinary individual in a very trying situation.

## II

Now we may turn to the contents of this unit of the book (7:1-8:3). Elsewhere we have tried to show that the book of Amos is structured around the visions, that his career as a prophet of Yahweh was initiated by his visions, and that his message was shaped by those experiences. Thus we understand the first two visions as inaugurating his mission as a prophet, and we have been able to isolate chaps. 5-6 and identify their contents with the first phase of his ministry as a prophet. When it comes to the second pair of

visions, the message associated with them is to be found in chaps. 1-4 of Amos. Clearly this second phase of the ministry of the prophet is the major one, and to it belong the bulk of the oracles preserved in the book. A brief and superficial analysis and outline would look like the following table:

Visions	Messages
1 & 2	Chaps. 5-6
3 & 4	Chaps. 1-4

If we were to go a little further we would break down the structures a little more and connect chaps. 3-4 with vision 3 and 1-2 with vision 4—thus confirming and elaborating on a plainly chiasmic arrangement of visions on the one hand and messages on the other. Briefly put, the first pair of visions sets the stage for the classic prophetic preaching of repentance, consisting of the warning that condemnation and punishment are imminent, and can only be averted by a wholehearted turning from sin and iniquity and an equally strenuous commitment to God and his covenant of justice and righteousness. These affirmations and exhortations are found interspersed in the oracles of chaps. 5-6, where the ministry proper of Amos begins, and it will also come full circle in 5:14-15—the midpoint of the book—with the same exhortation to the Israel that is (v. 14) and the Israel that will be left after catastrophe and disaster strike (v. 15; cf. in addition to 5:14-15, 5:4-6, 23-24).

The setting or framework provided by the first pair of visions is somewhat different and unusual. Supposing that these are the first visions of Amos' lifetime experience, and that they constitute his initiation into the work of a prophet, the impact of these terrifying sights must have been tremendous and overwhelming. The terrifying visions of an all-consuming locust-plague on the one hand, and land-engulfing conflagration on the other, conveyed their own message of devastation and annihilation—provoking the prophet (perhaps not even yet conscious of his role) into an intercessory intervention as rare as any action in the Bible (only one other successful intercession is actually recorded—Moses' well-known intercession on behalf of Israel after the appalling incident of the golden calf) and modelled on the great Moses himself. Successful as the intervention by Amos is—and the words spoken by Yahweh on either occasion are words of retraction proceeding from the act of divine repentance: "It shall not happen"—it is only provisional and temporary. The judgment and the threat remain—only suspended—providing the rationale and occasion for a preaching mission to the troubled nation.

Presumably it is the failure of the preaching mission or missions that gives rise to the second set of visions and the second group of messages. This time around, the visions and the colloquy between God and prophet, sender and the one sent, are very different. Yahweh is in full charge and Amos says almost nothing. The visionary objects themselves are neither surprising nor overwhelming but apparently ordinary things, while the message is not as obvious or apparent as in the first instances. Only it is worse—this time there will be no reprieve. Judgment has been reached, sentence imposed, and the punishment will begin forthwith. No further suspensions or postponements are contemplated or are even possible. Now the message is simply to announce in advance the unavoidable consequences of irremediable sin and defiance of the Most High and his commandments. That is for the sake of the record, and it is the prophet's duty to God and his fellow Israelites to state the case.

Thus the second pair of visions and discussions between God and prophet define and demark phase II of the prophet's mission, the major undertaking and the principal content of the current book of Amos, chaps. 1-4. Once again the order is reversed with later material preceding earlier data: thus chaps. 3-4 form the bridge between phase I (the warning), whose contents are found in chaps. 5-6, and the climactic address of phase II, found in chaps. 1-2. In chap. 4 we have a series of oracles, formulaic in character, which describe a number of plagues (reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt preceding the Exodus, but in the present time directed at Israel rather than an enemy or enemies), with the repeated refrain: "Yet you did not return to me." This sequence confirms the failure of the initial preaching missions, and paves the way for the ultimate and irreversible judgment pronounced in the second pair of visions (i.e., "I will never forgive them again"), and then proclaimed to the nations including Judah and Israel in full measure by the prophet in chaps. 1-2.

Why the apparent order of events and oracles is reversed, or at least demonstrably not chronological is an intriguing question, which may never be answered satisfactorily, although examples abound in the literature of all nations in which the author or compiler preferred to organize available information according to another principle or system. In the case of Amos, one important effect is to position the Great Set Speech against the eight small nations in the lands between Assyria to the north-east and Egypt to the south-west, at the very beginning of the book, thus focusing attention on the central and climactic message of the prophet. It is this irreversible pronouncement of doom that summarizes the prophet's mission, the im-



mediate and precise outcome of the second pair of visions. The repeated formula in chaps. 1-2, that the negative judgment has been rendered and "I will not reverse it" (under any or all circumstances), ties directly to the refrains in chap. 4 ("Yet you did not return to me"—which use a different form of the same verb: *šûb*) and behind them to the ominous declaration to the prophet in chap. 7—"I will never again pass over (= forgive) him."

The third and fourth visions (the latter confirming and reinforcing the former by a dramatic play on words, the force of which is unmistakable) thus provide the occasion and basis in the second culminating mission of the prophet, whose central message is exemplified and epitomized by the Great Set Speech (chaps. 1-2). But the biographical confrontation between Amos and Amaziah has been placed by the same compiler or editor precisely in the space between the 3rd and 4th visions, which clearly form an envelope around the narrative account. It will be noted that the episode is not placed between the two pairs of visions, as though it occupied an autonomous position in relation to the two pairs or sets of the latter, but is interposed between the two visions of the second pair, showing that the confrontation between prophet and priest belongs to the second set, is bounded by the account of those latter visions, and thus is to be linked in the strongest fashion with phase II and its uncompromising message of condemnation and judgment.

Already in Amos 7:9, we have such a connecting link in the words of condemnation there—threatening the destruction of the sanctuaries of the northern kingdom and the termination of the royal dynasty—which form a bridge between the vision (no. 3—vv. 7-8) and the confrontation narrative (vv. 10-17). It is because of those words of Yahweh uttered by the prophet that Amaziah the priest intervenes in the situation and takes steps to end the prophet's proclamation at the shrine at Bethel. On the basis of this information, which we will examine more carefully later on, we infer that v. 9 is only an extract or sample of what Amos was saying at Bethel, and furthermore, that that particular statement is clearly the most inflammatory of all the statements in the book in terms of political realities (i.e., a threat against the reigning royal house—or in Amaziah's rephrasing, the life of the king himself—came after a longer address, namely the Great Set Speech or a version of it). While the latter does not contain a direct threat against Israel, the omission is made up for repeatedly in chaps. 3-4, where Israel and Samaria are explicitly targeted as the object of violent military attack.

It is our contention, therefore, that the placement of the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah is deliberate and purposeful; that the editor-

compiler wished to combine various components in a dramatically effective way—linking the second pair of visions with the phase II mission of condemnation and judgment against the nations (including Judah and especially Israel), exemplified by chaps. 1-4 of the book of Amos and more particularly by the Great Set Speech or a version of it which Amos proclaimed at the shrine in Bethel—thereby precipitating the crisis and confrontation described in Amos 7:10-17. Thus phase II of the prophet's mission came to a conclusion in a stormy standoff between priest and prophet. The sequence, as organized by the editor-compiler, begins with the second set of visions, continues with chaps. 1-4, especially the Great Set Speech, and ends with the confrontation in chap. 7—back where it started.

### III

Another important factor in this dramatic literary presentation is the juxtaposition of the visions not only of the second set, but also of the first set, with the narrative of the confrontation. Here the arrangement is more like visual panels side by side, to be studied in binocular fashion. What the author is saying is that if we want to understand the dynamics of the confrontation between prophet and priest at Bethel, we must also bear in mind and study closely the confrontation between Amos and Yahweh described in the visions. While we tend to take the prophetic challenge to human authority for granted and assume that the true prophet will stand up to the national leaders, whether the high priest or the king who looms in the background, we need to consider and recognize that it takes extraordinary courage and confidence to hold one's ground in the face of superior force, and in the case of a prophet it is only the prior and continuing association with an even higher authority, God himself, that makes such resistance possible. Thus the author is saying that if you want to understand how and why this shepherd from Tekoa could stand firm in the face of contemptuous dismissal and implied threats, the answer lies in the juxtaposed account of Amos' visions and prior confrontation with his God. When Amaziah tells Amos not to disturb the peace at the royal chapel (so he describes the Temple at Bethel) and to go back to his homeland (Judah), Amos responds vigorously, even vehemently, by reminding Amaziah that he, Amos, is not concerned about the latter's importunities and urgings, because he is under orders and bound by them to bring his master's message to the people of Israel in the northern kingdom, specifically at Bethel. In short, Amos' experience in the visions has convinced him that he must obey the will and the words of God, rather than of human beings, no matter how highly placed those persons may be

or how worldly wise and sensible their human words may be. As Jeremiah learned in his own difficult experience, the essence of the prophetic mission is to obey the will of God even in the face of massive resistance and coercion on the part of human beings. Given a choice, the prophet, whatever his personal hesitations and misgivings or fears—often justified—for his personal safety or even his life, has no choice if he is going to be a prophet. He must obey God rather than human beings.

Still another aspect of this dramatic juxtaposition, and part of the interplay among the participants, especially Amos, who is a major player on both sides of the partition, has to do with the figures behind the figures in the foreground. Just as it is clear that Amos ultimately takes his orders from his God and he can speak in all respects as the spokesman for Yahweh, Amaziah evidently reports to and speaks for the king, Jeroboam ben-Joash. Doubtless Amaziah as high priest of the chief sanctuary of Israel—a legitimate rival of Jerusalem in terms of sanctity, antiquity, and intimate association with Israel's past and present, from the patriarchal times and experiences down to the division of the kingdom and the rich royal endowment and patronage of the Temple there—would claim the highest possible authority for his status and position, namely that of Yahweh the God of Israel, so that in principle at least, both men could and would make the same claims. Both are under the aegis of Yahweh, both take their marching and speaking orders from him, and both are dedicated and devoted to his honor and glory. But whereas in Amos's case this direct and undeniable connection is clear for both Amos and the compiler, that is not so clearly the case with Amaziah. At the very outset of the story in 7:10-17, Amaziah sends word to his boss, the king Jeroboam, about Amos and his terrible words, revealing a position of dependency and responsibility that is confirmed by the telling words that Amaziah uses in connection with the Temple of which he is the presiding priest. He calls it, *miqdaš-meleḵ hû' ûbêt mamlākâ hû'* "It is (the) royal sanctuary (the holy place of the king) and it is the Temple of the kingdom (i.e., the national cathedral)."

The fact that the nouns are not articulated does not signify that the shrine at Bethel was only one of many in the kingdom. While in prose we would expect the definite article to be used to identify and single out such terms, in poetry—and at the least we are dealing with poetic structure and parallelism (as befits a high priest)—the definiteness of the expression is determined from the tone of the utterance and the context. If anything, Amaziah would be inclined to exaggerate the importance and uniqueness of the Temple at which he is the officiant; certainly he would not be modest about its

status and standing in the realm. So we must not read the passage as a modest disclaimer of distinctiveness and preeminence, i.e., only one of many such shrines scattered around the kingdom, but rather as a boastful claim of unique and central importance—the royal chapel, the national cathedral. At most, there could be only one rival in the kingdom, the shrine at Dan which was also founded and funded by a king, the first Jeroboam; but there are reasons to believe that Dan, being far from the centers of power, always was secondary to Bethel. In any case, the high priest at Bethel would think so and whether boastful or not, his claim would be that of all the shrines in the country, the one at Bethel was outstanding, and at least one of its distinctive marks was the patronage of the king, conferring on it national and special royal status. That statement combined with the message sent to the king, as well as the cautionary remarks to Amos himself, show that Amaziah tended to confuse his royal with his divine master, and to equate allegiance to the one with subservience to the other. Cardinal Wolsey is reported to have repented on his deathbed about confusing these matters and to have remarked that if he had only served his God with the zeal and devotion that he had served his king, he would not have come to the sad end that was his fate. Amaziah apparently was unable to distinguish between his masters, and while no doubt giving appropriate liturgical lip-service to his God, nevertheless found it both prudent and expedient to serve his king unquestioningly.

Thus we see the confrontation and juxtaposition not only on two sides and at two levels, but we note that each of the men in the confrontation at Bethel report from (Amos) and to (Amaziah) his master. Behind the prophet Amos stands Yahweh, the God of Israel but also of the universe, with an importunate message for his people. Behind Amaziah the high priest of the Temple of the same Yahweh to whom the priest, equally with the prophet, owes ultimate allegiance, stands the king, the highest civil authority in the land, to whom the priest defers and for whose peace of mind he has the greatest concern. Thus, on the one hand, he warns the king of a potential threat to his life on the part of a trouble-making prophet, and on the other hand, he cautions the prophet against disturbing the peace and equanimity of the king's chapel, the royal realm, and indeed the royal disposition itself. In other words, the writer has deliberately distorted the picture in order to demonstrate the distance that separates the true servants of God from the false ones, the true peace-makers from the true trouble-makers, and most of all the gulf that separates human beings from God—the difference between true worship and service and the idolatry that substitutes human in-

stitutions for those established by God, and worshipping and serving the creature instead of the creator. In the end, in spite of the obvious humiliation of the prophet at the words and hands of the high priest, Amos is given the last words and they are devastating. Just as the remarks, in their present arrangement, began with a denunciation of the royal house (which naturally includes the head of the house, the king himself) so they end with a drastic condemnation of the high priest and his whole household. These two mutually supportive and congratulatory leaders of the nation are pronounced totally unfit for their stations and responsibilities, and condemned not only to death, but to the obliteration of their houses and their lines. This, according to the writer, is the divine verdict on the confrontation between priest and prophet, and on the plots and counter-plots described in the narrative, and the machinations of the priest and communications between him and the king. We do not know the final outcome, whether for priest or prophet, but the lines were sharply and decisively drawn between two kinds of religion, two kinds of dedication and devotion.

#### IV

Turning now to the story of the confrontation between Amos and Amaziah, we note that organization of the material is dramatic and literary and may not be in chronological order, as was seen to be the case with the book as a whole. There is a complex relationship linking the lead-in and transition verse (9) with Amaziah's paraphrase of Amos' message (v. 11), and Amos' concluding remarks in v. 17. All three verses deal with the fate of Israel (the northern kingdom), describing the destruction of sanctuaries and the captivity and exile of the people. They also deal directly with the individual destinies of the king and his priest. Two statements are repeated, either literally or approximately:

- 1) Against Jeroboam and his dynasty
  - a) And I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword (v. 9)
  - b) By the sword shall Jeroboam die (v. 11)
- 2) On the captivity of the nation:
  - a) "And Israel shall surely go captive from its land" (v. 11)
  - b) "And Israel shall surely go captive from its land" (v. 17)

Thus vv. 9 and 17 form an envelope around the narrative unit, while v. 11 combines the two statements in a single quotation. In addition, the doom of the sanctuaries, including obviously Bethel, is mentioned in v. 9, while



the doom of the priest of the sanctuary (at Bethel) and his family is pronounced in v. 17. The rest of the narrative fills in the details of the confrontation, but the major concern is with the destiny of the nation: destruction of shrines and captivity, and the specific consequences for the leadership secular and clerical: death and obliteration of dynasty and name for both king and priest.

Elsewhere we have tried to show that the narrative is not in chronological order and that following the sequence as given leads to difficulties in interpretation if not contradictions that produce too many questions about persons, motives, and events. Briefly the problem is this:

If, as is stated right at the beginning, Amaziah believes that Amos is part of a conspiracy against the life of the king, and reports this treasonable behavior to the king, including the words of that threat, then how could Amaziah encourage Amos to leave the premises and also the land, that is, to go beyond the jurisdiction of the king to safety in his homeland of Judah? In view of this strange juxtaposition, some scholars hold the position that Amaziah, in spite of his devotion and dedication to the king, nevertheless either didn't take Amos seriously or had enough superstitious regard for Amos' status as prophet, perhaps an authentic one, to allow him to escape, even encourage him to get away scot-free. We contend that such an interpretation makes no sense, common or otherwise. Amaziah has shown himself to be a man of decision and consistency, not a vacillator between opinions. One would expect him to act in either of two ways: 1) If he did not take the prophet seriously, he might well have warned him against speaking frivolously, even dangerously in public at the great shrine of Bethel and to leave quickly and quietly before he was arrested and would have to face serious charges of conspiracy and other crimes against the state. 2) If he took the prophet and his words seriously, seriously enough to denounce the prophet to the king and charge him with sedition and treason, then he would not also have told the prophet to run away. That would surely implicate the priest as an accessory after the fact, and Amaziah simply would not behave in such irresponsible fashion. He would have arrested Amos and detained him under guard (as another king did with another prophet in 1 Kings 22—perhaps for similar reasons). Receiving such a message (v. 11) from his chief priest, the king would immediately have initiated an investigation and sent a representative to Bethel to inquire into the matter, if he had not come himself. It is not difficult to imagine the royal reaction if, when the emissary (or the king) came to Amaziah at Bethel, he discovered that Amos was no longer there but had slipped away on the advice and with the connivance of

the priest. Amaziah would have been regarded as either monumentally foolish or more likely as a co-conspirator with Amos, in which case it would be strange if Amaziah stayed around to face a flabbergasted and then exceedingly angry king. In short, you just don't behave the way that Amaziah is described as behaving if you hope to stay in the high position you have reached.

In our judgment the only way to interpret the data is to rearrange the sequence and recognize that Amaziah's message to the king comes at the end of the narrative, not at the beginning. Again, skipping over the details, which are presented at some length in our new commentary, we conclude that Amaziah's initial reaction to Amos' preaching was rather patronizing, but on the whole not very hostile. He advised Amos to ply his trade elsewhere. Amos' response was predictable in the light of the visions: he preferred to obey God rather than any human authority—even if the priest here was the official representative of God at Bethel, the central shrine.

Then as the altercation between prophet and priest grew in heat and bitterness, Amos was able to reveal a second and perhaps crucial reason for the harsh language—he, Amos, had a personal message for Amaziah and also one for the king.

As a neophyte prophet, Amos, unlike illustrious and well-known predecessors (and successors), did not have ready access to kings and high priests. Taking his mission literally and with the utmost seriousness, he had to devise a scheme for reaching those exalted persons and delivering his message in person, or at least make the effort to do so. Once he had delivered the personal message to Amaziah, it is difficult to imagine that Amaziah would dismiss him as a crank or take him seriously enough to give him safe-conduct out of the country. When his message of what the high priest would regard as a form of blasphemy was coupled with the obviously treasonous character of his utterance about and against the king and his house, it seems clear that Amaziah would hold Amos in close detention until all these charges could be aired and weighed and a suitable decision rendered. Thus what began in somewhat lighthearted or superficial fashion rapidly escalated or degenerated into a major confrontation between the prophet of Yahweh and the priest of Bethel.

Unfortunately there is no information about the outcome (except for some speculation about the demise of Amos in the *Lives of the Prophets*, a Hellenistic-Roman work composed centuries later), but it is difficult to imagine that Amos merely went on his way, having dropped the bombshell about Israel, Jeroboam, and Amaziah. It may be that after the king investi-

gated the case he decided on balance that Amos was not a great threat, that there was no real conspiracy, and that Amaziah had overreacted! Amos may well have been beaten for his obstreperous words (as described in the *Lives of the Prophets*), and he may have returned to his home, broken in body but indomitable in spirit, to preserve the memory of the confrontation, which was the major part of his career, and to explain what led up to it and away from it, thus producing perhaps the first edition of the first prophetic book ever written. But all of this is mere speculation, and perhaps we should leave the matter here.

## V

Most commentators agree that the story of the confrontation between prophet and priest is a classic of its kind—commonly viewed as the collision between the word of God with the voice of human authority, i.e., the establishment, and doubtless the author-editor of the book of Amos viewed it in essentially the same way. He was more interested in the confrontation and its dynamics on both sides rather than with the outcome, about which we really know nothing—with one major exception. We know that Amos' prediction concerning Jeroboam, at least in the version articulated by Amaziah, remained unfulfilled. Jeroboam, at least according to the Hebrew Bible, did not die by the sword. It could be argued that the version attributed to Amos himself (v. 9) makes allowances for that possibility and specifies only the violent overthrow of the house or dynasty of Jeroboam, and eventually that did occur in the reign of Jeroboam's son and successor, Zechariah, who was assassinated and whose dynasty ended within a half-year of his succession. That might be regarded as adequate fulfillment of a prediction made by a prophet, although it would be more natural, in our judgment, to interpret Amos' words the way that Amaziah took them (unless Amaziah made his words up or quoted Amos from another speech), namely that the house of Jeroboam would naturally include the head of the house.

It is striking that, on the one hand, no significant effort was made to revise or modify Amos' prediction and, on the other hand, no editorial comment was added either to confirm or otherwise qualify a prediction where historical validity would be verified or falsified within a generation. Our impression is that the book or scroll of Amos, with its open-ended prediction, was written and published or circulated before any historical tests could be applied, and then it was too late to add the information when it became available. We know even less about the outcome for Amaziah and his family, although the prediction about Israel, the destruction of the tem-

ples and shrines came to pass and the population was carried away captive in the 30's and 20's of the 8th century BCE—a strong validation of the prophetic message but long after the time of Amos and very different in detail from the picture given in the Great Set Speech and other oracles. One can only marvel at the fidelity of the editors and scribes who diligently endeavored to preserve the prophetic words as given by the prophets rather than make history and prophecy coincide as they should have according to Deuteronomic prescription—and marvel even more at modern scholars who claim that there is very little authentic prediction in the prophets as preserved, and that most of what we have in that genre is *vaticinia ex eventu*. It is precisely the divergence between prediction and history that confirms the authenticity of the predictive genre as well as the honesty and integrity of the transmission process.

If confrontation between divine reality and human exigency (even or especially in the highest circles of the establishment) is the purpose and objective of the editor, as the story in fact shows, then the editor has taken great pains to enhance his thesis by the positioning of the story within the set of visions in chaps. 7-8, and specifically framing the narrative by the second pair of visions. In this way he places the confrontation at the climax and culmination of phase II with its categorical and irreversible pronouncement of judgment. He is also able to juxtapose Amos' confrontation with Amaziah with the prophet's interchanges with Yahweh, thus establishing the prophet as hero of the human encounter as the by-product of his prior encounter with God, and the priest as villain, whose own preparation for encounter consisted in learning the guidelines and ropes of real political life at the top of the human pyramid. So in addition to shaping the confrontation to suit his purposes in extolling true prophecy and bashing establishment priesthood, the writer also subtly examines and exposes the root of the problem in the diverse and divided loyalties of the two men. Amaziah, although in name and by profession the chief exponent of the religion of Yahweh in Israel (like the Archbishop of Canterbury), is in fact the loyal servant of his king, the sponsor and benefactor of the Temple where he, the priest, earns his livelihood, while Amos, the erstwhile shepherd and recently commissioned prophet, takes his orders and his cues only from God.

# Edmund Steimle and the Shape of Contemporary Homiletics

by THOMAS G. LONG

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PRESIDENT GILLESPIE, my friends and colleagues: I will be the first to admit that I may not fully understand the purposes of an inaugural address, but it seems to me that this is an academic occasion which includes an invitation to do the one thing that I, like most people I suppose, simultaneously dread and covet: to stand up in front of other people and to explain myself. Who is this person who dares to risk sitting in a professorial chair?

What I mean is that we are here today to engage in some theological conversation about what I understand to be significant issues in homiletics, and I want to do my best to evoke just that. Woven into the scholarly agenda, however, are some autobiographical threads. I cannot tell you what I think is important in preaching without also telling you at least a little of the story of how it is I came to value those things. Fear not; the main subject of this lecture is not I, but homiletics. To be more specific, it is about the continuing influence upon American homiletics of a particular homiletician named Edmund Steimle, who was and is a model for me in my work. But as I talk about Steimle and about how I see his contribution from where I stand, I also want to let you know something of how I came to be standing in the place where I see things the way I do.

## I

Almost twenty-five years ago, I was an entering junior in seminary, eager to begin my seminary training and already anticipating a lifetime of parish ministry. I was also a newlywed, having been married the month before seminary classes began. Sherrill, my wife, was still in college, and since both of us were students, I was in desperate need of a part-time job. I thought about substitute teaching, but since I had seminary classes in the morning, that was out. None of the local merchants, I discovered, needed afternoon help. So this is how I ended up as a disk jockey at a rural South Carolina radio station—spinning records, breathlessly shouting used car commer-



cials, doing the soybean market report, and somberly announcing the "obituary column of the air."

Since I was the new kid at the station, I got all of the shifts no one else wanted. I worked on Thanksgiving. I worked on Christmas. I worked on New Year's, and (here is the point of this story) I worked on Sunday mornings. If you have never heard a rural South Carolina radio station on Sunday morning, your theological education is lacking. Sunday morning is the religious ghetto of broadcasting, preacher-time in "radioland," and it has been said of Sunday mornings on country AM radio stations that the farther to the right on the dial you go the kookier the religion gets. Our station's frequency was 1590. I would sit at the control board from dawn to noon on Sunday, airing one fire-baptized, wind-sucking preacher after another, each one more frantic and loonier than the one before.

However, there was one striking, almost startling, exception to this frenzy, one island of refuge amid this frothing sea of fundamentalist adrenalin. It emerged initially as a voice on a religious broadcast, not the strident voice of the stereotypical radio preacher, but a conversational voice, a worldly-wise voice, the slightly weary voice of a man seated next to you on a commuter train, a voice crackling with intelligence, bristling with questions, and filled with pain.

I knew very little about this voice—only that it belonged to a Lutheran minister named Edmund Steimle, and that the voice spoke whenever I ran the tape of a radio program called the "Lutheran Series of the Protestant Hour." I did not know at the time that Edmund Steimle was a graduate of Princeton University and the Lutheran Seminary in Philadelphia, had been a parish pastor for almost twenty years, and was then the Brown Professor of Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in New York. I did know that I had never heard anyone preach the gospel quite like he did and that, because of that voice, the direction of my own ministry was now profoundly changed. Wearing a pair of earphones in a country radio station in South Carolina, listening to the sermons of a Lutheran professor from New York, I was converted to homiletics. I wanted now to be a preacher, a preacher like that, a preacher who thought long enough and hard enough about preaching to know what it meant to preach like that. In short, I wanted to have that voice. I never got it, of course, but in trying to do so, in trying to match the cadences and the claims of my voice to that voice, I began to find my own voice.

Without being aware of it, I had already learned my first lesson in homiletics. We begin to learn to preach in much the same way that artists begin

to learn to paint: through imitation. All of the lectures and exercises of a preaching classroom depend, in great measure, upon the student's active memory of preachers heard before, of preaching models. Those models may be preserved, modified, or finally rejected, but they serve as the essential pedagogical starting points.

Also, without being aware of it, I had acquired for myself a rich and complex model for preaching. Edmund Steimle was not only exerting his influence upon me; I have since discovered that there were hundreds, maybe thousands, of other preachers who also heard that voice as a special voice. Moreover, he was exerting powerful and formative influence over the practice of American homiletics. He was in the middle of, and to some degree was the cause of, a major shift in American preaching. Ironically, he created this impact without ever producing a major theoretical work in homiletics. His publications, aside from a few scattered essays and some chapters in a textbook published after his retirement, are altogether sermonic.<sup>1</sup> He was not essentially a theoretician; he was a preacher, but his practice, to use the current jargon, was theory-laden, and his practice has changed our theory. What I would like to do in this address is to lift up analytically a few aspects of Steimle's preaching and to connect them to current discussions in the field of homiletics.

## II

Steimle was among the first contemporary homileticians to recognize that a sermon is a piece of theologically shaped rhetoric and that it operates as a literary and communicational whole. That is to say, the *form* of a sermon, in distinction to its particular subject matter, is itself a theological issue. "Every sermon," he said, "should have something of the dramatic form of a play or a short story: tightly knit, one part leading into and dependent upon the next, with some possibility of suspense and surprise in the development and at the end. . . . If a sermon is to be biblical at its deepest level, it will draw us into the development of a plot. . . ."<sup>2</sup> That notion, now fairly standard homiletical fare, was a feature of Steimle's preaching from the 1950's on. Steimle was an innovator in sermonic form.

One of the perennial questions for homiletics is: What should guide a

<sup>1</sup> Steimle's publications include "The Story of Good and Evil," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 31 (Spring 1976); "The Fabric of the Sermon," *Luther Theological Seminary Review* 17/1 (Spring 1978), various chapters in Edmund Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles Rice (eds.), *Preaching the Story* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), and several collections of sermons.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Steimle in Steimle *et al.*, *Preaching the Story*, p. 171.

preacher in the shaping of a sermon, in how it's organized? Do you craft a sermon according to the internal coherence of the sermon's subject matter? If so, then sermon design is a matter of clear outlining, tight categories, and logical connections. Or do you build a sermon according to the listening patterns of the hearers, what grabs their attention, the sequences and rhetorical moves that hold their interest and persuade them—or deeper, along the structural lines of the ways in which listeners process information? If so, sermon design is a matter of the psychology of communication. Or do you design sermons according to the literary or conceptual patterns found in the biblical texts on which those sermons are based? If so, sermon form is a matter of exegetical fidelity. Or is there some master sermon “genre” which sermons must more or less “fit” if they are to be recognized as sermons? If so, sermon form is a matter of meeting the ritual generic expectation.

There is a sense, of course, in which the preacher must respond to all of these. Without rejecting any of these guidelines, however, Steimle factored one more element into the equation and allowed it to operate in a normative and controlling fashion. What he added was the principle that the gospel itself, imaginatively grasped as the totality of the biblical message, could be seen to have a shape and to possess certain communicational traits and that sermons ought to display these traits and be patterned after this larger shape of the gospel itself. Steimle was influenced in this regard by the work of New Testament scholar Amos Wilder, who argued that the birth of the gospel was not only the birth of a new idea, but also of a new rhetoric, a “renewal and liberation of language.”<sup>3</sup> It is at this point, I think, that Steimle truly becomes a practical theologian, because he sees already embedded in his understanding of the gospel communicational implications, and he also sees in the seemingly mundane practice of putting together the nuts and bolts of a Sunday sermon not merely rhetorical technique, but an embodiment of the theological character of the gospel.

Heinz Zahrnt, in his survey of 20th century Protestant theology, is particularly critical of Barth for his lack of guidance precisely about this matter of sermon form. He overstates the case, I think, but he scores a point nonetheless, when he says:

Nothing reveals the lack of contact with the contemporary historical situation in the theology of Barth so much as the fact that the *language of preaching* plays virtually no part in it. When Barth discusses this, he

<sup>3</sup> Amos Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 18.

does so almost entirely in a negative way, criticizing and rejecting the idea. This is all the more surprising, since the point of departure of Barth's whole theological thinking was the difficulty of preaching. . . . [Barth] has always given the question of the substance of preaching precedence over the question of the form of preaching, in the conviction that once the substance was rightly understood, the form would appear of itself. As though it were as obvious as that! As though one could distinguish so simply between substance and form!<sup>4</sup>

Zahrnt perhaps reads Barth too harshly, but it does seem to me to be true that when we do not follow through and make the connections between our larger theological understanding of the gospel and the practical task of crafting and forming sermons, then into the void rushes much mischief. A survey of some of the recent popular literature of homiletics gives one the impression of a field constantly fiddling with sermon form, often in the most haphazard and theologically disconnected fashion. We get the picture of homileticians as slightly crazed electricians, popping into the fuse box of sermon form pennies, chewing gum wrappers, various narrative schemes, induction, psycho-literary plots—whatever works to keep the juice on in the sanctuary. Or, as Richard Lischer of Duke puts it:

The implicit hope is that is only we could find the perfect glass slipper of form, not only would the sermon be transformed into a beautiful princess, but we ourselves would be transformed. . . . Perhaps . . . preachers will reclaim the center when homiletics reclaims the center, when homiletics grounds the rhetorical act of preaching in God's own speech act.<sup>5</sup>

This was precisely what Steimle attempted to do, to ground the rhetorical act of preaching in his larger understanding of the gospel as speech.

So, what did this mean for Steimle? How did he understand the shape of the gospel, and how did this affect the shape of his sermons? He did so, I think, in ways both large and small. First, in the smaller sense, Steimle attempted to allow specific communicational traits that he saw as characteristic of the whole of the biblical witness to become communicational traits of his sermons. I will give two examples:

<sup>4</sup> Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1966), pp. 116-17.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Lischer, "Preaching and the Rhetoric of Promise," *Word and World*, VIII/1, pp. 69-70.

1) Amos Wilder had taught him that the Scripture as a whole presents a God who speaks to, addresses, and calls human beings and who also invites them to response and mutual understanding. In other words, said Wilder, "The character of religion as it appears in both the Old and New Testaments makes the dialogue an inevitable form of rhetorical expression."<sup>6</sup> Steimle took this seriously. If the gospel as a whole was dialogical, then sermons, though monological in format, should in some way be dialogical, too. For a while, in order to contrast his style of preaching with others, he even called his sermons "conversations" instead of "sermons," and those who heard his radio sermons were almost always impressed with indeed how conversational they were, how he made the listeners feel as though they were discussing the Christian faith with him over a cup of coffee. Steimle's sermons are characteristically rich with signs of the hearers' presence and sounds of the hearers' voices. The language of Steimle's sermons does not breathe "now get this message and get it straight," but rather "this is true for us, isn't it so?"

Eventually for Steimle, dialogue came to mean more than mere conversation. If God speaks and humanity responds, then there builds up in the faithful community a memory of the Word. Sermons, then, don't exclusively come to the church from some point outside, they also well up from within the church. As Fred Craddock has noted, preaching in the context of the church, of the faithful community, means that the preacher does not always tell the people what they need to hear, but also on occasion says what they would like to *say*. "The listeners say, 'Yes, that is my message; that is what I have wanted to say.'"<sup>7</sup> Listen to this conclusion to one of Steimle's sermons preached in December of 1971, a sermon that not only speaks the gospel *to* the hearer, but also gives voice to the desperate, yet hopeful, faith *of* the hearer. This sermon began by noting the way we typically overdo Christmas in our culture—K-Mart Christmas carols and tinsel and lights—too big, too brassy, too tawdry, too much. It ends this way:

Prisons seethe; ghettos smolder; slums stink; and B-52's continue to bestow carnage on Southeast Asia. And this was the world—changing the details here and there—of Elizabeth and Mary, too. Death and disease and hopeless old age; poverty and ruthless power; human life held cheap. The whole bit. And yet they continued to live and to hope and, above all, to be open to the . . . wonder and mystery of God who

<sup>6</sup> Wilder, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), p. 27.



can do marvelous things even in a world like theirs which is a world like ours.

So here we are. Two weeks away from Christmas. And the excitement and anticipation grow for most of us. We want peace—God, how we want peace! And the reign of love! . . . And so, despite all the excesses of the Christmas preparations and celebrations, too much music and too loud, decorations too garish and too tawdry. . . . And yet how else can we express the “hopes and fears of all the years” unless we hang out ridiculous little . . . lights, light candles in the windows, put up holly and mistletoe, recreate the fantastic scenes of shepherds and a stable—hoping and believing—even if only half believing—that there is a Beyond come to live with us, share our life and conquer its death. It’s our response to the “beating of unseen wings,” too. How else?<sup>8</sup>

2) Steimle also believed that, in addition to the trait of dialogue, the Bible as a whole always spoke the gospel in relation to historical particularities. The biblical witness was not a set of religious ideas, but rather an announcement of God’s action in concrete human situations. The gospel, he was convinced, was not internal and privatistic, but public; not abstractly religious, but secular; not timeless, but always bound to time and place. He once confessed that he had been an admirer of the preaching of the Scottish preacher James S. Stewart, until it dawned on Steimle that many of Stewart’s printed sermons had originally been delivered during World War II, but one could never have guessed that from the sermons. They were, said Steimle, “timeless . . . but the timeless sermon . . . is a poor sermon.”<sup>9</sup> Or, as he put it on another occasion: The sermon that begins in the Bible and ends in the Bible is not a biblical sermon.

This is, of course, an issue of sermon content, but it was also, for Steimle, a question of sermon form. The sermon, Steimle held, should constantly shuttle back and forth between the biblical text and the contemporary situation, never allowing the distance between the two to grow large. Steimle’s sermons by and large display this rhythmic interaction between text and world, and one of the admirable features of Steimle’s sermons is that while they are very clearly, and intentionally, exegetical and biblical, they are also very clearly, and intentionally, products of their time. They could not be preached today without alteration because laced into the fabric of them are

<sup>8</sup> Edmund A. Steimle, “The Beating of Unseen Wings,” a sermon preached on “The Lutheran Series of the Protestant Hour,” December 12, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Steimle *et al.*, *Preaching the Story*, pp. 168-69.

simply too many references to Vietnam, hippies, the Black Manifesto, Hubert Humphrey, Woodstock, and the like.<sup>10</sup> This is not an accident of Steimle's preaching style, but an essential expression of his understanding of the theological character of the gospel.

Dialogue with hearers and the interweaving of text and context are two of the several smaller and more specific communicational characteristics of the Bible employed by Steimle as guidelines in forming sermons. There is also, however, a larger theological pattern at work shaping Steimle's sermons. Steimle was, as I mentioned, a committed Lutheran, and his sermons show the shaping effect of the broad contours of a Lutheran understanding of the relationship between law and gospel.

In his recent book *Justification*, Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten practically screams that the Lutheran pulpit today is in grave crisis because of a collapse of (and these are his words) "the homiletical theory of law and gospel."<sup>11</sup> And what is this "homiletical theory of law and gospel"? It cannot be simply summarized because the concepts "law" and "gospel" are themselves quite complex in classical Lutheran thought, but according to Braaten it is basically this: "God has two different words to say to humanity; the Word of God comes to the world and to the church in the twofold form of law and gospel."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, "the law is prior to the gospel in a fundamental sense."<sup>13</sup> "The law of God," according to Braaten, "reveals the human condition in a state of estrangement, unable to reconcile itself . . . , and the gospel of Jesus Christ brings about new life, regenerating, justifying, and sanctifying. . . ."<sup>14</sup>

The way this "homiletical theory of law and gospel" worked for Steimle, I think, was to guide him toward the creation of many sermons that consisted broadly of two parts, two phases, two movements, with a turning, a change of direction, a transformation in the middle. Now the interesting thing is that Steimle's first move, his "law" section, was not so much the proclamation of humanity's estrangement from God as it was giving voice

<sup>10</sup> The constant references to current events in Steimle's preaching, so refreshing in his radio sermons, posed problems for the publisher when those sermons appeared in books. The "shelf life" of a Steimle sermon was sometimes quite brief. See, for example, the reference to Jimmy Carter in the sermon "Follow Me" in Edmund A. Steimle, *God the Stranger* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). When the sermon was first preached in the early 1970's on "The Protestant Hour," the reference was to Richard Nixon.

<sup>11</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *Justification: The Article by Which the Church Stands or Falls* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 144.

<sup>12</sup> Braaten, p. 148.

<sup>13</sup> Braaten, p. 148.

<sup>14</sup> Braaten, p. 145.

to the experience of that estrangement. Steimle did not announce the "law." He cried out as a human being under the "law." It was typical of Steimle to give reign to his own (and our) doubt, his own (and our) sense of the absence of God. His voice would growl with cynicism. Listen to this section of a sermon on John 10, preached on "Good Shepherd Sunday":

—I can't disguise my own negative feelings about this imagery of shepherd and sheep. . . . Lambs may be cuddly and cute, but sheep are witless and stupid, as I have learned from those who have raised them. . . . Moreover, of all the symbolism that I have seen in stained glass windows and church paintings none has turned me on less than . . . the Good Shepherd. It's pious. It's banal. It's way out of the range of my immediate experience. It simply turns me off. So when the passage goes on to talk of wolves and hirelings, you might as well be telling me the story of Little Red Riding Hood. As when Jesus says, "The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep," I react strongly against the picture of a strong, warm human being giving up his life for a lot of dumb, witless sheep.<sup>15</sup>

People who heard Steimle for the first time would often sit in astonished silence for the first half of the sermon, wondering if there had been some mistake, if the man in the pulpit were some sort of impostor, as they listened to this gravelly, somewhat grumpy voice giving vent to rage, doubt, despair, and bitterness. A person at the door of the church one Sunday, a person who had evidently not successfully navigated the bend in the sermon river, told him, "You ought to have your mouth washed out with soap."<sup>16</sup> Once, when Steimle was preaching in a university chapel, a shocked and offended student stood up in the middle of the sermon and shouted, "This is a lot of atheistic nonsense. God is very much alive and present. This man is a false prophet." Steimle looked out at his accuser and replied, "That may very well be. But hear me out, and we'll see."<sup>17</sup>

And when one did hear him out, the sermon would inevitably turn from cynicism to hope, from doubt to faith. But it was never a glib or easy turn. In fact, on the tape recordings of his sermons one can sometimes hear him sigh as he makes the turn. Steimle here reminds me of what John Macquarrie said of Bultmann. Noting that Bultmann, on the one hand, had this

<sup>15</sup> Edmund Steimle, "Wolves, Sheep, Hirelings, and Shepherds," sermon preached on the "Lutheran Series of the Protestant Hour," May 6, 1973.

<sup>16</sup> Steimle *et al.*, *Preaching the Story*, p. 37.

<sup>17</sup> Steimle recalls this incident in his sermon "Talk is Not Always Cheap," preached on "The Lutheran Series of the Protestant Hour," June 24, 1973.

radical program of demythologizing, but, on the other hand, believed that God had acted decisively in Christ, and that he somehow held these two things together, Macquarrie said, "We do not find fault with him for [this]. . . . Rather we might say . . . that Bultmann's greatness here shows itself in his steadfast refusal to follow his own ideas to the bitter end."<sup>18</sup>

Steimle gave expression to the anxiety and estrangement that is part of contemporary experience, but he refused to follow his own ideas to the bitter end. This "law-gospel" tension, and finally resolution, was in great measure what made Steimle a powerful and compelling preacher. He was, in short, what virtually every thinking and honest person of faith is: half believing, half faithless; holding on by his fingernails to the Christian faith, but holding on; using his mind to test every conviction, but truthful and wise enough to know that whatever faith he had he did not get there by thinking his way into it.

Viewing this as one who belongs to the Reformed tradition, I am more instructed by Steimle's honest humanity, by his urgent faith, and by his conviction that the overall character of the biblical witness should shape preaching than I am by the particular law-gospel structure of his sermons. I share Charles Wood's thought that the biblical canon "functions to show what the Word of God is . . .," that "... properly activated, it norms all other Christian Witness," and that its basic form is narrative. As Wood states:

The form of the canon itself may indicate something of its mode of functioning. When one regards the biblical canon as a whole, the centrality to it of a narrative element is difficult to overlook: not only the chronological sweep of the whole, from creation to new creation . . . but also the way the large narrative portions interweave and provide a context for the remaining materials, while these other materials—parables, hymns, prayers, summaries, theological exposition—serve in different ways to enable readers to get hold of the story and to live their way into it.<sup>19</sup>

This does not mean that sermons should always be narratives and that preaching should be storytelling, as some contemporary homileticsians want

<sup>18</sup> John Macquarrie as quoted in Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 175.

<sup>19</sup> Charles M. Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding: An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), p. 100.



to argue.<sup>20</sup> What it does mean is that the biblical canon is basically narrative in form but that it also contains a wide variety of other rhetorical forms representing the many ways in which faithful people respond to and live their way into that basic story. In the background is the larger story, and in the foreground are people telling the story, singing praises and laments, discovering ideas in the story and teaching them, deriving ethical instruction from the story, and so on. Preaching does the same, and though the form of sermon should be shaped by an understanding of the gospel, no single form is sufficient and a particular sermon always assumes the form appropriate to its function. The narrative shape of the gospel is always in the background, though many rhetorical functions and forms may be in the sermonic foreground. When Barth said that in his preaching he did not rely on his rhetorical ability, but "on the contrary," he said, "I allow my language to be formed and shaped and adapted as much as possible by what the text seems to be saying,"<sup>21</sup> he ironically may have given us one of the best practical theological clues we have for discerning the potential rhetorical strategies of sermonic discourse. The rhetorical forms of sermons are at least as many and as varied as the rhetorical forms of scripture.

### III

A second shaping influence of Edmund Steimle can be felt in the area of biblical hermeneutics for preaching. Of the popular preachers of the 1950's-1970's, Steimle was perhaps the most serious exegetical biblical preacher. It is, in fact, stunning and encouraging that his sermons, created out of engagement with critical biblical scholarship, could have found such a large radio audience. Steimle insisted that textual sermons are the norm for Christian preaching; he kept up with developments in the biblical field, and his sermons demonstrate both the importance to biblical preaching of technical biblical scholarship and (here is the issue I want to raise) the ways in which the activity of preaching modifies that scholarship, indeed the whole hermeneutical equation.

Many people interpret biblical texts in all sorts of settings, but in preaching the interpretation of scripture occurs in the most local sense—in *this*

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), Richard Jensen, *Telling the Story* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1980). Steimle himself once argued that sermons should take "the form of a story told" (*Telling the Story*, p. 171), but by that he seems to have meant only that the sermon structure should show movement, progression, and development analogous to a "plot."

<sup>21</sup> Karl Barth in Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, translated by Peter Fraenkel (London: Centenary Press, 1946), p. 127.



place, for *these* people, on *this* day, as they struggle with *their* faith and *their* mission in *these* ways. So it seems to be a matter of simple common sense to say that the biblical preacher must discover the meaning of the biblical text and then apply it to a new and quite specific situation. Indeed, many homileticians have put it just that way—interpret, then apply.

However, Charles Wood, again, in his book *The Formation of Christian Understanding*, has underscored the fact that much in contemporary hermeneutics challenges the common sense notion that the goal of biblical interpretation is to find the text's meaning, as if meaning were some sort of objective property of the text. This is by no means a novel thought, but what is particularly helpful about Wood's view is his substitution of the relational phrase textual "understanding" for the more objective phrase textual "meaning" and his connection of understanding to the uses to which the text is put. Part of what allows for textual understanding is the expectation one has of the text, of how it will function to shape our identity, initiate us into some skill, disclose some insight, or enable emotional or moral growth.<sup>22</sup> Use is, quite naturally, defined by the user. As Wood says, the cab driver and the cartographer may look at the same map but have somewhat different understandings of it, because they put the map to different uses.<sup>23</sup>

Preaching is, of course, permeated by the question of use, and the location of preaching within the community of faith, which expects nothing less than God acting through scripture to shape its vision and identity in the present tense, establishes the conditions for textual understanding. Preaching does not involve finding some objective meaning in a biblical text and then applying it to the contemporary community of faith; it rather involves preachers bringing texts into catalytic encounter with very specific congregations, expectantly seeking understanding and then bearing witness, that is to say telling the truth about, what has been understood about how God is acting through this text today to shape the vision, identity, and mission of that community.

Now most of the time this sort of use, the use to which a preacher puts a text, overlaps with, but is not identical to, the uses which are contained in technical biblical scholarship. The strange thing is that preachers know this and are often embarrassed by it. We know what good, scholarly biblical exegesis is, but as Sunday draws nearer there is this nagging and persistent question: "Yeah, but will it preach?" Yielding to that question, allowing

<sup>22</sup> See Wood, pp. 104-105. For Wood the basic "use" of the canon of Scripture in the Christian community is the discerning of the knowledge of God.

<sup>23</sup> Wood, p. 19.

"preachability" to govern the text-to-sermon process, seems like an intellectual compromise, a cowardly refusal to scale Exegesis Mountain in favor of staying in the valley and making golden calves for the people.

But this is not necessarily so. To raise the issue of "preachability" in working with a text is not an intellectual compromise; it is the old fashioned preacher's term for what is now widely acknowledged in hermeneutics: the context-specific nature of all interpretation. Biblical scholarship is essential for responsible Christian preaching, but biblical scholars cannot tell preachers how to understand texts, and good biblical sermons are not simply popularized treatments of the findings of specialized biblical exegesis. Preachers and biblical scholars have different angles of vision, different expectations of textual use. Preachers, because they are engaged in the act of biblical interpretation for *preaching*, see and thus understand texts differently. Biblical scholarship can unlock the door of a text, and it can show the preacher around the place, but it cannot do what the preacher must do: enable the congregation to live there and call it "home."

An example of this can be found in Steimle's late 1960's sermon on the parable of the ten maidens in Matthew 25:1-13. In order to interpret this parable, Steimle turned, as virtually every good and responsible biblical preacher of that time would, to the work of Joachim Jeremias, one of the leading parables scholars of the day. Jeremias, as you may remember, was concerned to discover the meaning of the parables as Jesus originally told them in his ministry. Jeremias was persuaded that Jesus taught ideas about the kingdom of God, and he used parables as good, clear illustrative teaching devices to do so. If we want to know how Jesus conceived the kingdom, claimed Jeremias, we need to get back to Jesus' own version of the parables.

The problem, of course, is that we do not have access to Jesus' original parables; we have only the collected, arranged, modified, embellished—Jeremias might even say "mangled"—versions of the parables in the synoptic gospels. So, what Jeremias did was to imagine that the original parables had been processed through a transformation machine operated by the early church. They took Jesus parables, inserted them in one end, and turned the handle. This machine had an embellishment gear, an allegorization gear, a conflation gear, a change of audience gear, and so on. Once Jeremias had reconstructed this machine, all he had to do was to put a synoptic parable through the machine backward, turn the handle in reverse, and out would eject a reasonable facsimile of Jesus' original parable.

When Jeremias "un-processed" the parable of the maidens, it lost a lot of weight. That clumsy line that Matthew attaches to the ending ("Watch

therefore . . .") got stripped away. After all, that line doesn't fit the parable. None of the maidens in the story watched; they all fell asleep. Also, the allegorical details were burned off. Jesus wasn't talking about the delay of the *parousia*, but he was telling a true-to-life wedding story to make a clear point about the imminence of the kingdom. The idea that Jesus was teaching in *his* parable, claimed Jeremias, was simply this: The kingdom is coming and woe to you if, like those foolish maidens, you are unprepared.<sup>24</sup>

Now Steimle reads Jeremias, but Steimle the preacher must consider the usefulness of the text in a different way from Jeremias the biblical scholar. Steimle can understand what Jeremias is saying *about* the text, of course, but Steimle cannot *understand* (to use the word in Wood's sense) the text this way. Steimle must preach the parable to people for whom the issues have changed, people who are not immediately concerned about the *parousia*—delayed or imminent, or whatever. In fact, in Steimle's view his hearers, tuning in on their radios, are less concerned about the kingdom and when it may or may not be coming than they are about whether there is even a God around at all to bring in a kingdom.

Even so, Jeremias gave Steimle the clue he needed to preach the text when he took Steimle into the environment of the parable itself and pointed to the fact that in the story all the maidens slept. The difference between the wise and foolish was not that the wise watched, but that the wise were prepared for the bridegroom's delayed arrival. So Steimle, carrying his contemporary congregation and their needs with him, enters the story imaginatively through that opening, and suddenly he sees something, hears something, and the sermon gives voice to it.

He begins his sermon by quoting W. H. Auden:

In W. H. Auden's "Victor. A Ballad," Victor is betrayed by his wife.  
So . . .

Victor walked out into the High Street,  
He walked to the edge of the town;  
He came to the allotments and the rubbish heap  
And his tears came tumbling down.  
Victor looked up at the sunset  
As he stood there all alone;  
Cried: "Are you in heaven, Father?"  
But the sky said "Address not known."

<sup>24</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 51-53, 171-75.

He followed this with a discussion of how people today often experience God as absent—"prayer seems like talking into an empty barrel" and all attempts to find God are answered "address not known." Then, turning to the parable, he says:

... the last line ... scholars agree was added by some ancient editor to the original story ... "Watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour." But that misses the point! *All* the bridesmaids fell asleep, the wise as well as the foolish. [At this point Steimle is essentially quoting Jeremias.] And there was apparently nothing wrong in that. It was a long wait. The bridegroom was delayed. And the foolish bridesmaids were unprepared for *that*—for the delay, for the absence. ... It may be a long time before you will have unmistakable assurance that God is present.<sup>25</sup>

Note the jump, from delay to absence. With Jeremias, Steimle shifts the parable from watchfulness to preparedness, but he translates the eschatological issue into an existential one, namely the contemporary experience of the absence of God. Has he been faithful to the text in doing this? One could argue that either way, but what he has done methodologically seems to me necessary and authentic. He brought the parable itself, the best biblical scholarship he could find, and the situation of his hearers together into a risky, unpredictable, uncharted, multi-sided conversation in an effort to arrive at some kind of mutual understanding. The sermon bore witness to that understanding. For good or ill, Jeremias, the biblical scholar, gave Steimle some direction, but he had to leave him at the bridge that goes to the pulpit. He could not tell Steimle how to understand the text or what to say.

#### IV

Finally, Steimle was one of those who created a change in what has traditionally been called sermon "illustrations." If one examines other sermons from the period, especially in the 1950's, one finds that sermon illustrations were used quite traditionally as teaching devices, inspirational anecdotes, or as moral examples. If the preacher was attempting to convey a difficult point in the sermon, an illustrative story from life could be introduced to make it clear. Or an example story with a moral point could be told—a homiletical "Aesop's Fable."

<sup>25</sup> Edmund Steimle, "Address Not Known," a sermon preached on "The Lutheran Series of the Protestant Hour," November 23, 1969.

What Steimle did, however, was to ground the sermon illustration in the honest realities of human experience and to connect that experience to the imagination. He asked: What does the world really look like and feel like to one who struggles with the faith? What can one see and feel and believe there if one knows how and where to look? This means that Steimle actually used very few self-contained illustrations as such. Rather, images and fragments of experiences permeate the sermon. There is a gritty, street-wise quality to his preaching, and the experimental material is full of ambiguity. The "canned" preacher story is avoided in favor of the illuminating conversation, the family dispute, the moment of surprising joy, the painful experience that somehow nevertheless conveys grace. With Steimle's illustrative style, one does not so much "get the point" as one begins to see oneself and one's world in a new way.

Steimle employed many experiences from his own life, a strategy that has always been controversial. Indeed, a friend of mine told me that he was in church recently. The service had ended and the people were moving toward the exits. He was sitting in the pew talking with a friend of his, and some children were running around in front of the sanctuary. A little boy ran up into the pulpit area, and looked out over the sanctuary. He spotted his mother in the back of the church, and he shouted into the still-live mike, "Mommy, mommy, look at me! Look at me!" The person talking to my friend heard this and said, "I think I've heard *that* sermon before."

Steimle's use of personal experience was never autobiographical, however, in the sense that personal disclosure was the aim and end. Two qualities made this the case. First, Steimle told personal experiences that were porous to the experiences of the hearer. He recounted moments from his own life that were likely to trigger recognition in the hearers. "This is the way I experience life and the gospel," he seemed to say. "Do you experience them this way, too?" Second, there was almost always an unfinished quality about his personal illustrations. He was never the hero; things were never quite tied together; there was never a pat moral lesson to be learned. The experiences pointed beyond themselves. There was a far horizon that could not be described and could only be dimly seen. As Steimle himself once said, "Surely the preacher's own experience of the faith has something to do with the authority with which she or he preaches the Word. But personal experience takes us only so far. . . . [Sermons] hold out the hope of an eschatological banquet . . . ; we speak necessarily of things beyond our own experience."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Steimle *et al.*, *Preaching the Story*, pp. 38-39.



Speaking of personal experience, one last word. I find it to be one of those ambiguous, but finally grace-filled and joyous experiences to be with you in this place doing the work that God has put in our hands to do. My prayer is that I can be for you the kind of supportive colleague and friend that you have been for me, and that I can, in some way, be for others the kind of teacher of preaching that Edmund Steimle was for so many.

# A Pastor's Quarrel With God

by EUGENE H. PETERSON

*This year's commencement speaker, Eugene H. Peterson is the pastor of the Christ our King Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, Maryland and Adjunct Professor at St. Mary's Seminary. He is the author of several books, the most recent of which are Contemplative Pastor and Answering God.*

Texts: Jonah 4  
Mt. 16:21-26

I'M TRYING to get this straight, this vocation as servants of the word in the church. It is not easy these days to figure out what this means. Anti-servant models are promoted daily among us as pastors, teachers, missionaries. In the criss-cross of signals and voices I pick my way. William Faulkner once said that writing a novel is like building a chicken coop in a high wind—you grab any board you find and nail it down fast. Being a pastor is also like that. Recently I came across Jonah, and grabbed on. He has turned out to be useful in this vocation-clarifying task.

The Jonah story is a favorite everywhere. Children commonly love this story, but adults are also fascinated with it. Outsiders who have minimal knowledge or interest in our scriptures know enough about Jonah to laugh at a joke based on the story. And scholars, stuffed to the gills with erudition, write learned articles and books on it. Its influence can be seen in such diverse progeny as *Pinnocchio* and *Moby Dick*. I got the book at both ends of my educational spectrum: I can remember flannel-graph presentations of the story in my Sunday School in Montana; twenty years later in New York it was the first book that I was to read straight through in Hebrew. It was just as interesting in Hebrew as it was on flannel-graph.

\* \* \* \* \*

I want to hold up a single scene in the Jonah story to mark this moment of transition, this hour of commencement, this day of vocational focus on your life as pastor or teacher or missionary. It is the final scene in the Jonah story—Jonah quarreling under the unpredictable plant, Jonah quarreling with God.

Quarreling with God is a time-honored biblical practice: Moses, Job, Da-

vid, and St. Peter were all masters at it. It is a practice with which men and women in ministry are all familiar. We get a lot of practice in this because we are dealing with God in some way or other most of the time, and God doesn't behave the way we expected.

Jonah is quarreling because he has been surprised by grace; he is so taken aback that he is disagreeable about it. His idea of what God is supposed to do and what God in fact does differ radically. Jonah sulks. Jonah is angry. The word anger occurs five times.

Anger is most useful as a diagnostic tool. When anger erupts in us, it is a signal that something is wrong. Something isn't working right. There is evil, or incompetence, or stupidity lurking about. Anger is our sixth sense for sniffing out wrong in the neighborhood. Diagnostically it is virtually infallible, and we learn to trust it. Anger is infused by a moral/spiritual intensity that carries conviction—when we are angry we know we are on to something that matters, that really counts. When God said to Jonah, “Do you do well to be angry?” Jonah shot back, “I do well to be angry, angry enough to die” (4:9).

What anger fails to do, though, is tell us whether the wrong is outside us or inside us. We usually begin by assuming that the wrong is outside us—our spouse or our child or our God has done something wrong and we are angry. That is what Jonah did, and quarreled with God. More often the wrong is inside us. If we track the anger carefully, we will often find it leads to a wrong inside us, wrong information, inadequate understanding, underdeveloped heart—and facing that, find ourselves pulled out of our quarrel into something large and vocational in God.

There is a certain innocence in Jonah's anger. It flares up out of a kind of childish disappointment. What it reveals is an immature imagination, an underdeveloped vocation. His wrong was not in his head but in his heart. It was not a theological error that ignited his anger but a spiritual poverty. He knew his dogmatics: “I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil” (4:2). No, there was nothing wrong in Jonah's knowledge of God. But he was unpracticed in God's *ways*. He was new at this vocation of gospel ministry, and didn't yet know the lay of the land.

Jonah is standing in a place large and seething with creativity, gospel creativity. Nineveh, against all probabilities, has been saved. Jonah saw none of it because of his dwarfed imagination. He had just failed at a religious job—he had predicted the destruction of Nineveh, and it didn't happen,

and he blamed God. He had no awareness that his spiritual vocation had just expanded exponentially.

\* \* \* \* \*

When I was five years old, I would walk across the meadow between our backyard and our neighbor's fenced fields. I would stand at the barbed wire strand and watch him plow the field with his enormous tractor. The thing I wished for most in those days was to get a ride on that John Deere tractor. One summer day I was standing at the fence (I would never have dared to climb through it), watching Brother Storm, for that was the farmer's name, plow the field. He was probably a hundred yards away and spotted me. He stopped the tractor, stood up from the seat and made strong waving motions to me with his arm. I had never seen anyone use gestures like that: he looked mean and angry; he was large and ominous in his bib overalls and straw hat. He was yelling at me, but the wind was blowing against him, and I could hear nothing. I knew that I was probably where I shouldn't be, five year old boys often are. I turned and left. Sadly, I hadn't *felt* I was doing anything wrong—I was only watching from what I thought was a safe distance and wishing that someday, somehow I could get to ride that tractor. I went home feeling rejected, rebuked.

Leonard and Olga Storm were huge Norwegians, and forbidding. I was in awe of them. They never smiled. They exuded a kind of thick, Nordic gloom. They were members of our church and always sat in the back row with their son who was confined to a wheelchair with muscular dystrophy. They were also rich; at least rich by the standards of our working-class sectarian congregation. They had moved into our mountain valley from the plains of Eastern Montana where they had made a lot of money from wheat fields and oil wells. Whenever there was an emergency need for money in the church—the furnace, say, needing replacement—the pastor would work the fundraising on the spot from the pulpit: we need \$2000; how many will give \$20? how many \$50? how many \$10? People would raise their hands. The pastor had a pad of paper and kept a running total. When the interjected prayers weren't opening up any more hearts or wallets and we were still far short of the goal, Brother Storm (everyone was either "brother" or "sister" in our fellowship), would rise ponderously from his station in the back pew and say, "I'll make up the difference." The "difference" was always several hundred dollars. I was always impressed.

The Sunday after my disappointment at the edge of his field, Brother Storm called me over after worship and said, "Little Pete"—he always called me "Little Pete"—"Little Pete, why didn't you come out in the field on Thursday and ride the tractor with me?" I told him that I didn't know I could have, that I thought he was chasing me away. He said, "I called you to come, I waved for you to come, why did you leave?" I said that I didn't know that was what he was doing. He said, "What do you do when you want to get somebody to come to you?" I showed him, extending my index finger and curling it back towards me 3 or 4 times.

He harrumphed, "That's *piddling*, little Pete; on the farm we do things *big*." (Do you remember Major Hoople in the comics of 30 years ago? Major Hoople was always harrumphing. In real life, Brother Storm, who also looked a little like Major Hoople, was the only person I ever knew who harrumphed.)

I was crushed. I felt small. I was already small on the outside; now I felt small on the inside. Disappointed and crushed. But also a little angry. This gigantic Norwegian farmer calling me and my world piddling. I was a five year old Jonah—displeased exceedingly.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am not trying for anything precise in setting these two stories alongside each other, but trying to locate the common elements in the failure of imagination that prevented me from enjoying that John Deere tractor and the failure of imagination that prevented Jonah from rejoicing in the salvation of Nineveh.

I had such a small idea of the world. I interpreted the large, generous actions of the farmer through the cramped confined experience of the five year old. And so, of course, I misinterpreted. Like Jonah hanging on the fence at the edge of Nineveh, disappointed with what he was seeing. And then angry in his disappointment.

Jonah's sulking disappointment came from a failure of imagination, a failure of heart. He had no idea what God was doing—the largeness of his love and mercy and salvation. He had reduced his vocation to his own performance—he was in the right place, doing the right thing—but he interpreted everything through his Jonah ideas, his Jonah desires. It was certainly commendable that he had become obedient, that he was doing what he had been called to do. But he was inexperienced in God, a stranger to grace. He had a program layed out for Nineveh ("Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall



be overthrown!"). But God had a destiny to fulfill in Nineveh ("And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city?"). Jonah's program was a child's index finger; God's destiny was a huge gesture. Jonah had a child-sized plan that did not pan out; God had a hugely dimensioned destiny that surprised everyone when it was enacted. Jonah assumed that he knew exactly what God would do; when God didn't do it, he was displeased. God had purposes far exceeding anything Jonah imagined. Jonah thought he had come to Nineveh to do a religious job, to administer a religious program. God had brought Jonah to Nineveh to give him an experience of amazing grace. The tables are turned: it is no longer Jonah preaching to the people of Nineveh, but the people of Nineveh preaching to Jonah—inviting him into a vocation far beyond anything he had supposed.

\* \* \* \* \*

What I want to deal with here is the daily difficulty that we pastors and teachers have in adjusting our job descriptions to the vocational surprises of grace. We are in charge of maintaining institutional, moral, and intellectual order in places brimming with the energies of creative spirit. And we repeatedly find ourselves angry with God, disappointed and quarrelsome that our procedures result in something quite different from what we had anticipated.

We stand at our pulpits and lecterns and extend an index finger to suggest that people tidy up their morality, or embellish their piety, or get the facts straight. And God is waving his windmill arms, calling all of us to grace and mercy and salvation.

Jonah seems such a small, forlorn figure—satisfied when the plant grows and cools him, displeased when the plant withers and he is parched by the hot sun. How can he be reduced to such puny emotions, such piddling obsessions, such small comfort, such trite discomfort. Here is a man who has been in and out of the whale's belly, who has made the self-sacrificing commitment to be a faithful minister in Nineveh instead of a self-indulgent tourist to Tarshish. Has graduated from Princeton! Has seen Nineveh, his congregation, his classroom, turn to God. And he is petulant.

He is petulant because things didn't turn out the way he expected. His program was not fulfilled. No matter that in his preaching *God* was heard and believed, *Jonah* was ignored. And Jonah was feeling sorry for himself, quarreling with God under the unpredictable plant. So easily had he confused the biblical vocation in which he was called into God's work, for a

religious job in which he used God as an adjunct to his work (and when God didn't do the job he was supposed to do, dress him down good).

I do this so much, live out this Jonah story word for word. St. Peter did it too, quarreling with our Lord at Caesarea Philippi. . . . Like Jonah, quarreling with God because God is not a literalist. . . . Like Jonah, bossily taking charge of the destiny of my Nineveh congregation and angry when my will is not done. . . . Like Jonah, lining up the people for an evaluation review, and angry when the whole thing turns into a singing and dancing celebration. . . . Like Jonah, making my small finger gesture to which I periodically reduce my vocation, puzzled and angry as God waves his everlasting arms in a huge, inviting welcome.

\* \* \* \* \*

The story I told you earlier had a good ending. A few days later I was back at the fence, watching, hoping I might get a second chance. The giant Norwegian saw me, stopped the tractor and did it again, made that sweeping motion of invitation. I was through the barbed wire in a flash, running across the furrowed field, and then up on the big green John Deere. He let me stand in front of him, holding the steering wheel, pulling the plow down that long stretch of field, my smallness now absorbed into his largeness.

And Jonah? How does the Jonah story end? We don't know. We don't know what Jonah does after his quarrel with God. Does he angrily stomp back to Joppa and try for another ship to Tarshish, fleeing again the presence of the Lord? I don't think so. Do you know what I think? I think he stuck it out in Nineveh, living into the largeness of God, embracing the surprising and past-understanding mercy of God, for the rest of his life embarrassed at that trivializing quarrel under the unpredictable plant, for the rest of his life running towards the huge windmill invitational arms of grace and blessing, climbing breathless into his pulpit, behind his lectern, living into the large mysteries of his vocation.

# In Our Circumstances . . . God Gives

by THOMAS W. GILLESPIE

Farewell Remarks to the Class of 1990  
by the President of the Seminary

ON THIS special day, in this awesome place, your families and friends have come to celebrate with you in your graduation from Princeton Theological Seminary. The trustees, faculty, and administration of this institution join with them in saluting your significant achievement. Our joy is not in seeing you leave, but in knowing that you go forth to serve the Lord Jesus Christ in a variety of ministries to the church for the sake of the world.

I think it accurate to note, however, that the world is not waiting breathlessly for your arrival on the scene. Increasingly our American society at least devalues the church and depreciates the ministry to and through it. Our culture looks for its future leadership at this season of the year more from those who graduate from colleges and universities, law schools, medical schools, and business schools than it does from those who graduate from theological seminaries.

Retired AT&T executive Robert J. Greenleaf, in a little monograph addressed to seminary trustees and published by the Lilly Endowment, notes that "seminaries . . . are marginal institutions."

They are judged marginal because, in our highly industrialized society, they do not carry the weight of influence and leadership that their place in the scheme of things makes possible. I sense that they are marginal in their own self-image, in the eyes of their principal constituency, the churches, and in the public view.

This judgment, according to Greenleaf, is particularly tragic because it is so unnecessary. In point of fact, he argues, seminaries occupy or could occupy a "strategic space" in the hierarchy of institutions. For they have

the opportunity to give sustaining support to churches, and churches, in turn, can give religious nurture and moral guidance to individuals directly and support (as conservers of tradition and advocates of values) the whole gamut of "operating" institutions: governments, schools, businesses, hospitals, social agencies, philanthropies, families, communities.

In our present context, that sounds like an extravagant claim. Are we not being told by sociologists and historians that the so-called mainline Protestant denominations are rapidly becoming sideline institutions? Are we not faced by the fact that the steady decrease of our memberships is more than matched by the erosion of our cultural influence? Under such circumstances, how is it possible to take seriously the vision articulated by Robert Greenleaf?

The question reminds me of the incident in which a woman met a friend and asked, "How are you doing?" "Oh," replied the friend, "not too bad under the circumstances." To which the woman rejoined, "What are you doing under there?"

As humans, we know that it is necessary for us to live *in* our circumstances. As Christians, however, we believe it is unnecessary for us to live *under* them. The God we confess and proclaim is One who is deeply involved with us in our circumstances, but also One who brings to bear upon our circumstances a power and purpose that transcend them.

At our Commencement Exercises a year ago no one could have imagined the radical changes that have occurred since in the societies of Eastern Europe. Yet as incredible as those changes may be, they have in fact occurred and are continuing to occur.

Recently I heard the Librarian of Congress, Dr. James Billington, say that the American public will never learn from its news media the crucial role played by the churches of those lands in effecting these unbelievable social and political transformations. When the whole story of these events is one day told, it will be impossible to ignore the role played by the Lutheran Church in East Germany, the Roman Catholic Church in Poland, the Church of the Brethren in Czechoslovakia, and the Reformed Church in both Hungary and Romania. For these hard-pressed, often persecuted Christian communities kept alive for half a century an alternative vision of what it means to be a human being. And these communities of faith were led by faithful priests and pastors who have been doing the very things which you now go forth to do—preaching and teaching, administering the sacraments, and rendering pastoral care.

Laszlo Tokes was one such minister whose pastorate in a small Hungarian Reformed congregation in Timisoara occasioned the revolution in Romania. There he proclaimed the Word of God with such power that the tyranny of the Ceausescu regime was exposed by the light of the gospel. The government ordered his bishop to banish him to a church in a tiny village. When he refused to leave his congregation, the Secretariat (secret police) surrounded his house and prepared to arrest him. Pastor Tokes and

his pregnant wife escaped out a back window by a ladder and made their way to the sanctuary of the church. The congregation, joined by Romanian Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics, surrounded the church, holding lighted candles and singing hymns. It was the breaking of those lines by the secret police that led to mass protests in the streets of Timisoara and to the subsequent massacre of unarmed civilians.

When the Secretariat broke into the church, they found the Tokeses standing defiantly in front of the Lord's Table, thus reliving the experience of Adonijah of whom it is written that "they brought him down from the altar" (I Kings 1:53). Pastor Tokes was wearing the typical liturgical cape of the Hungarian Reformed pastor, like the one I have on today. It is not the academic Geneva gown with which we are familiar, but the ecclesiastical version of the cape worn by a Hungarian shepherd. The intended symbolism is evident.

Two days before last Christmas, a small delegation from the Reformed Church in Hungary located Pastor and Mrs. Tokes in the small village of Menyo where they had been relocated by the secret police. In an interview on that occasion, Laszlo Tokes was asked how he felt about the revolutionary events in which he and his wife had been involved. In the translation that came to my desk, he replied:

I must establish quite soberly that I did not organize any demonstration, nor did I start consciously a revolutionary movement, but the circumstances got worked out in such a way, and God gave that our little church . . . the series of demonstrations in Temesvar (Romanian: Timisoara), the series of demonstrations in Temesvar which have become world-famous and shattering since then . . .

Notice that crucial line: "the *circumstances* got worked out in such a way, and God gave. . . ."

I doubt that the Romanian society took any more note of the graduation of Laszlo Tokes from theological seminary than our own society today takes of yours. And I doubt that on that day Laszlo Tokes had any more of an idea of what the future held for him in ministry than you have of what it holds for you. But the witness of his life can be a source of encouragement to you and to us all.

The faithful pastor, the responsible shepherd, can make more of a difference in this world than many of us are prone to think. For in the circumstances of Christian ministry, God gives the unexpected and transforming power of transcendent grace.



# No Longer Servants, but Friends

by CHRISTIE C. NEUGER

*Baccalaureate preacher for the 1990 commencement exercises, Christie Neuger is Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology at Princeton Seminary. She also serves as co-ordinator of the clinical pastoral education program.*

Texts: Exodus 33:7-11a

John 15:12-17

I AM VERY PLEASED and grateful for the honor of being invited to speak to you. And I welcome the opportunity to do the two things that I most want to do today: first, to preach to you about my understanding and interpretation of the word of God in this context, and second, to say good-bye.

We don't say good-bye very well in this culture. Generally, we prefer to slip away, or pretend that we're really not going, or that things will stay the same until we meet again. Sometimes we find ways to break off relationships before we have to say good-bye so that we don't have to face the pain of that. One of the family rules my father had was to never say good-bye, especially on the telephone or when leaving after a visit. My sister and I, since we were the ones who lived out of town, used to try to trick him into saying good-bye on the telephone. We would call during the day so that he couldn't say "Good-night." We would say good-bye suddenly, hoping that he would follow suit. But he didn't. He had a sort of superstition that if he said good-bye, something bad would happen. One of the most important things that happened in our relationship was that he was able to say good-bye before he died. It allowed the transition to take place appropriately. Saying good-bye is hard for most of us, and we all get messages as we are growing up that good-byes are things to be avoided.

And here we are, at a baccalaureate service, where saying good-bye is part of the plan. And it's hard for us. We prefer to look ahead and experience the excitement of the future rather than take the moment to let go of the past. Yet, somehow, we know it's important to deliberately and consciously go through the process of separation. We know that it's hard to say "hello" to something new without saying good-bye to that which we are leaving. It helps us to claim and to integrate the value of our past so that we can take it usefully with us into the future.

Saying good-bye obviously is not unique to our time and place. The passage which we read this afternoon from the Gospel of John was taken from several chapters which are commonly known as the "Farewell Discourse."

It is the gospel writer's portrayal of Jesus' saying good-bye to the disciples during the last supper. It contains many of the ingredients which make up the process of saying good-bye.

First, Jesus looks at the meaning of their time together and recaps those things which have been important. He reminds the disciples that in their time together he has told them all that he has been told. He helps them to remember the ministry together and the meaning of their activities. In the footwashing act, which is recorded early in the Farewell Discourse, Jesus reminds the disciples of the heart of the ministry message which is the great reversal—that those who truly wish to be close to God, to be first, must be willing to give care to others, to choose a life of service. This looking back is one of the elements of saying good-bye.

Jesus also focuses on the current feelings between himself and the disciples, and among the disciples. He knows that the crisis moment in his life and work has come. He knows what is coming. In fact, John's Jesus always speaks from the triumphal vision beyond the cross. Jesus is able to identify the pain of the moment—to tell the disciples that they will feel despair at his leaving; that they will feel fear at the events that are about to unfold; that they will betray him and themselves during this difficult time; and that these experiences of the pain of separation will not be the last word. Acknowledging the reality of these painful feelings is part of the process of letting go.

As Jesus talks about the hope of God's purposes, he gives a glimpse into the future for the relationship between himself and the disciples. He reminds them that, although they must go through this difficult time of loss and betrayal and fear, the relationship will not be lost. It will be transformed. Things will be different. But they will not lose each other. He tells them that he will continue to be with them as he sends to them the Paraclete, or Advocate of truth. This will be part of their ongoing connectedness. He also says that he will see them again, in a new form, but he will return to them. And he says that they may ask anything of God, in his name, and it will be granted to them. His spirit and power remain in them and with them. He brings the meaning of the past and present into the future.

This time of farewell, with its rich focus on the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, hinges on the themes of love and friendship. As Jesus talks about the transformation of relationship, he does so with a particularly poignant phrase. He first offers the disciples a new commandment which is that they love one another as he has loved them. And then he says that he will now call them friends rather than servants because servants do not

know the purpose and meaning behind what they are asked to do. But the disciples, these friends of Jesus, know what is being asked of them. They know the meaning behind Jesus' life and ministry, and they will understand the meaning of his death when they can see it through the eyes of the resurrection. They now engage willingly in carrying out the ministry and serving as witnesses to the truth of Jesus' re-presentation of God. There is a mutuality in the relationship between the believers and Jesus as they carry out the work of God's reign.

This movement to naming the relationship as friendship in the midst of farewell is a significant one. It redefines the past as well as the present, and it sets forth a clear call about the future. It tells the disciples that their time of ministry with Jesus has been a form of apprenticeship, preparing them for leadership. They are now asked to be partners in the enterprise rather than being primarily followers. They are asked to make a choice, and they are asked to back up that choice with their lives. I believe this has special implications for our work in ministry, so let's look at how Jesus sets out this concept of friendship.

First of all, Jesus' view of friendship is not a romantic one. It is not a sense of being buddies or playmates, although it is clear in the record of Jesus' relationship to the disciples that he could understand friendship in this way as well. Rather, in this context, it is a willingness to stand with another, to commit oneself to advocacy, to loyalty, and to a shared purpose. It is a willingness to use oneself on behalf of the friend. In a context of mutuality, it means accepting the validity of another's voice and adding one's own voice to the other's in support. It means empowering another to speak and to be heard. And, it means to do all these things within a commitment to mutual accountability. Friends hold one another accountable—accountable to each other and accountable to the Spirit of truth given to the community.

This standing with others for the sake of strengthening their witness and supporting their purposes is backed up by the statement of Jesus that "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." For the early church community to whom this gospel is directed, this is a statement giving meaning to martyrdom for the sake of Christ. For the community in which we live and work, how are we to understand this definition of friendship to which we are called?

Maybe there is a clue to this in looking at who Jesus and the disciples are in John's gospel. As I said earlier, the Jesus in this gospel knows, as do the believers in hearing this gospel, that he has crossed the boundary between life and death triumphantly and in doing so has changed the world for the

believers. Jesus, then, speaks from this other side. He says to the disciples in this farewell speech, "I am going where you cannot go right now. I will prepare a place for you but it will not be available to you at this time." The disciples are able to recognize that it is not their time to cross the boundary but in accepting the invitation to be friends of Jesus they do, in fact, move to the edge, to the boundary, to live on the border, to be marginalized.

It seems to me that this choice for marginalization is important. Those who accept the offer of friendship with Christ freely agree to move to the borderland in a number of ways. In the first place, they do so in terms of time. The believers who accept the friendship of Christ, as we have defined friendship, live in the now and the not yet which is so central to the Gospel of John. They have joined the triumphal time of Christ, and yet they are not beyond the boundary which bridges life and death. They are not fully in the reign of God, but they are no longer merely passive followers. They are—we are—the agents of God's reign, living in the now and the not yet with faithfulness.

Living on the borderline, on the margin, is also true in terms of the culture. Accepting the friendship of Christ means a willing disenfranchisement from the systems of power in order to befriend those to whom cultural power is denied. For the early church of John's gospel, being culturally marginalized as a Christian was not a choice. Persecution forced Christians out of the center. But for all of us here, it is a choice. Even those of us who have been marginalized by the dominant culture have at least one foot in the center by virtue of our class, our education, and our profession. Yet we are asked to step out of that center, that position of cultural power, for a power of a different sort. We are asked to set aside our stories, our prejudices, our assumptions, our lives, for the sake of taking up one another's stories and representing them to the ones who would trample over them. In order to be advocates of one another, we must be able to speak one another's stories. We must be able to stand for one another with honesty and integrity—and in order to do that we need to be willing to lay down our own lives and all that we hold precious in them, so that we might take up the life of another who may have no voice and no power without our advocacy.

Jesus said that the greatest love was to lay down one's life for one's friends. This was said in full knowledge that this was Jesus' own path. In solidarity with the voiceless and disenfranchised, he took on their voice and their cause, and it brought death. But it also brought victory in the friends who continued to carry the power of solidarity. Being a friend of this kind, one who lives at the boundary, means carrying on the work of empowering



those who have been rendered powerless by injustice and by false idols. It means joining one's life to the lives of others in a community of support—lives laid down in common for the sake of God's reign.

I often tell students that the most difficult and the most foundational aspect of pastoral care and counseling is being able to listen to and empower a story which is different from one's own without feeling like one's own story has been invalidated or taken away. For example, listening to an African-American remind me that my foreparents participated in the disempowering and destroying of her foreparents is hard for me to hear. I become frightened that my life may mean nothing if I hear the life story of this other as valid and powerful. But it does not invalidate my life. What makes my friendship valuable is that I willingly lay down my life story, not denying it or devaluing it in the process, so that I can truly hear and support the life story of this other. It is only in this act of solidarity that I can stand with this person as friend. We are commanded to do this by the one who calls us to friendship and to the boundary, and who defined this kind of love as the condition of friendship.

I do want to be clear that I am not saying that the goal of the Christian life is sacrifice in and of itself. The goal of the Christian life is to live out the power of God's love in our friendship with God's creation. When the goal or primary value in Christian life becomes sacrifice instead of connection with God's power of love, we have created a false idol. I am particularly aware of the number of folks who are abused or damaged by the selfish and sinful behavior of others. Maybe the battered wife is the paradigmatic example. Often those people are offered the advice or the "holy" answer that this is their cross to bear or that God finds value in their "willing" sacrifice on behalf of others. But, in most cases, this is meaningless sacrifice rationalized as godly in order to maintain the status quo or to take the path of least resistance. This is the story of a person pushed to the margin without a choice—a person with whom we must join in solidarity in order to respond to our call of friendship with Christ.

Living at this boundary also means that we must learn to live faithfully with ambiguity. Boundary areas are often murky and confusing. Living in the center of life, within the cultural power system, generally offers us great, though deceptive, clarity. We are often able to see things as one way or another, either/or. There is no in-between. But choosing to live at the boundary means that we are willing to live with uncertainty, knowing only that we are to love one another as we have been loved. Love of this sort has very few hard and fast rules. Decisions about how to act are often made by



feeling our way through the process, testing our movement within the community of believers, rather than with real directional clarity. It is only faith in the power of God's friendship that allows this kind of trust that God's power will be made manifest through our acts of friendship.

Many recent theologians have talked about God's friendship as a central metaphor for our experience and understanding of God. Others have tried to give content to that metaphor and have talked about God's love as the power of right relation—the power to live as a friend in mutuality and trust. For me, it's pretty awesome to think of friendship with God as my calling. What does it mean to move that close to God and to be empowered through that relationship to befriend God's creation and to receive befriending in return? I think of Moses in the passage from the book of Exodus that we read. Moses placed the tent, and himself in the tent, at the boundary of the camp, not in the midst of the activity but on the edge. And the passage says, "God spoke to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." Almost everywhere else in the Old Testament we are told that to look upon God's face means our death. Yet here God addresses Moses as a friend—face to face—and out of that comes Moses' ability to befriend those under his leadership.

I think that I know something about being befriended by God. Many years ago, before I went to seminary, I was going through a particularly difficult time in my life. One feature of that difficulty was the experience of pervasive anxiety and an uncertainty about my life. I became rather paralyzed, not knowing in what direction to move.

A part of my anxiety was centered in my faith life. I stopped praying because I was very frightened of God. For some reason I believed that God would come to me in some form, especially if I opened the door through my praying, and when that happened, I would die. I kept remembering the phrases from the Bible which told me that if one looks upon the face of God, she or he will die. I avoided any avenue which might lead me to an encounter with God.

I mentioned my fears finally to my pastor (feeling quite crazy to have this kind of problem), and in talking about the fears they began to fade. They finally moved to the back of my mind, and I gradually allowed myself at least to think about God again. I began to read theology books and to do volunteer work for the church, and eventually I felt that I should attend seminary. I did that, still experiencing some anxiety and a great deal of shyness. As I've told some of you, I went through my first year and a half of seminary without ever voluntarily saying a single word in class, and I feared that I could never preach a sermon in front of people. Anyway, de-

spite this lack of voice, my seminary classmates, my professors, my field ed supervisors, the people to whom I ministered all called out the best in me. They supported and cared for my intellectual and spiritual health, and after three years I felt that I had been transformed by their care. And as I prepared for my ordination after these years of seminary, all of a sudden I remembered the power of my fears about God appearing to me and demanding my death. What I realized then was that God had appeared to me in the faces of all those people who had befriended me, and God had instead demanded of me my life. God had found a way to speak to me, face to face, as one speaks to a friend, and by doing so had brought me life and invited me to use that life in befriending others. God's face had been the face of salvation in a variety of ways, and I had seen it in those who had been willing to go to the boundary to befriend one who had little power and little hope in order to give her life. It made all the difference.

So God's love, God as the power of right relation, fully present in the life of Jesus, offered to the believers through his invitation to friendship, means that we are invited to move to the boundary where we can step into that power of God's love and offer it to others through our work of befriending. It is also the place where we experience the befriending of ourselves by others. There may be times when it feels like an unwise way to behave. There may be times when the boundary feels like a place of powerlessness. There will often be an overwhelming sense of ambiguity and uncertainty. But we are called to this place to accept freely the offer of friendship. And living out the love of this friendship can make all the difference for us and for those to whom and with whom we minister.

As we come to this time in our lives where we say good-bye to a place and a time and a context which has prepared us in new ways for the fulfilling of our vocations, I hope that we will take the time to reflect on what our experience at Princeton has meant; on what this moment of transition means for us and our relationships; and on what it means to move into the ministries to which we have been called. And, as we reflect, I hope that we can see the connections of our friendships and the power of our befriending, grounded in God's love.

Let me say now to each one of you, good-bye, and may God richly bless every moment of your lives and your ministries. Amen.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Wuthnow, Robert. *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989. Pp. 189. \$14.95.

For those who have been waiting for the "abridged version" of Robert Wuthnow's masterful account of *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, 1988), your wait is over. For others concerned about the bumpy present of American Christianity and its uncertain future, Wuthnow has some important sociological and theological insights to share in his latest book.

In *The Struggle for America's Soul*, Wuthnow distills the principal insights from his earlier tome (and from other analyses he's done along the way), augments them with pointed stories and images, adds some colorful commentary, and serves it all up as a series of lessons for concerned practitioners in the contemporary church.

Wuthnow advances the thesis that the American religious scene is in the midst of a titanic and determinative struggle between two warring factions. These are broadly construed as "liberals" and "evangelicals" (or conservatives; he uses the terms as roughly synonymous, although the latter permits him to include fundamentalists, pentecostals, and others who might not easily fit under the "evangelical" rubric).

The struggle revolves around society-wide trends—especially broad-scale patterns involving the erosion of traditional religious beliefs and practices, or "secularization." In response to these trends, liberals have generally sought ways to accommodate to and incorporate innovations into their experience; evangelicals have tended to resist the trends as threats to the religious status quo.

According to Wuthnow, the *context* for this struggle incorporates the full sweep of American institutions. He details the course of the struggle as it is played out in the media (a major force for "secular hedonism," as well as a promising new vehicle for evangelization); in higher education (where the bifurcation between secular and church-related institutions has resulted in competing networks of scholars and contrasting scholarships); and in big government (which has grown enormous by replacing churches as the principal agent for social service, and whose branches—especially the Supreme Court—have played a significant role in separating the church from its historic tasks in the public sphere).

Wuthnow suggests that the case of the PC(USA) is instructive of the consequences of this struggle. This denomination has been especially susceptible to the winds of secularization; the declining importance of denominations, a "bland Milquetoast liberalism," and the unraveling of the ideal of "unity amidst diversity," have all served to undermine this once mainline denomination.

Wuthnow sees a few signs of vitality in the PC(USA): he notes that there are a growing number of well-educated *women* who have found a positive home in the PC(USA); and he remarks on the continuation of a long-term pattern of denomi-

national switching that benefits the PC(USA) at the expense of Baptist and other traditionally less-educated groups.

Nevertheless, his assessment of the prospects for reconciliation—either through insulation (opposing perspectives encapsulating themselves and refusing to dialogue within the church), legislation (opposing groups slugging it out through the traditional political structures), or compassion (opposing camps somehow discovering that their opposition is contrary to divine intention)—seems rather bleak.

A chapter of particular note considers the conflict between science and religion. In contrast to much liberal postulating, Wuthnow argues, their differences have more to do with the “precariousness” of the *scientific* than the *religious* worldview. As the “social construction” of the scientific perspective is increasingly laid bare, its inherent assumptions become vulnerable to religious critique. In self-defense, the world of science has had to resort to border building, setting up distinctions between its own cognitive turf and that of religion. The world of religion has responded in kind. Each thereby defines itself (in large part) in opposition to the other. Wuthnow contends that each camp would be better served if it were able to dialogue with the other.

While it would appear that Wuthnow has painted the church into an untenable corner with name-calling and invective ruling the day, he is not so pessimistic. He considers the current struggle to be an essential process of winnowing out the extremes of all sides, forcing critical elaboration and articulation of faith in a changing world, and generally clearing the air for a new consensus. The task ahead, he concludes, will not be an easy one, but it involves “work at the center” as Christians strive “to bring these [opposing] choices together in faithful and creative ways.”

DONALD A. LUIDENS

Hope College

Mesters, Carlos. *Defenseless Flower*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989. Pp. 175. \$13.95.

As the poor in Latin America have come together to study the Bible in the midst of their suffering and struggle, they have discovered dimensions of its message which often surprise and shock us. Their re-reading of the Bible has had a profound influence in shaping liberation theology and has produced a movement of spiritual revitalization associated with the Christian Base Communities. And a number of Biblical scholars, who have been integrally involved in this process with them, have contributed to it and learned from it.

Carlos Mesters is one of these scholars. A Dutch missionary and Carmelite priest, he has worked for more than twenty years among the Christian Base Communities in Brazil. He has made an immense contribution to the orientation of these communities and their leaders in this re-reading of the Bible; at the same time, he has been greatly influenced by them as his eyes have been opened to what they see when

they read it. He has also done much to help scholars, pastors, and lay persons who are not poor, to understand how the poor are reading the Bible and what they are finding in it.

*Defenseless Flower* makes available, in English, a number of his essays, written with this objective in mind. They include an article written for *Concilium*, a paper prepared for a Commission of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, and two longer reflections on how the Bible was used and interpreted by the people of the base communities when they came together in two of their national meetings in 1977 and 1979. In and through all of them, he strives to present "photographs of the poor of Latin America interpreting the Bible in their communities."

The picture that comes through is that of the most marginal and oppressed people discovering that, through the Bible, God speaks to them giving them God's message *today*. Life and Bible mix and, as this happens, they discern the deeper meaning of both. The Bible releases its meaning to them through a new experience, an experience of resurrection. They read the Bible with familiarity, that of people who feel at home in it. Their main concern is not to interpret the Bible but to interpret life with the help of the Bible. As they struggle together to put the word into practice, they understand it at a deeper level. As they examine the text, making use of exegetical materials, they take into account both the "pre-text" (their life situation) and the "con-text" (their faith lived in community).

As a scholar, Mesters places a high value on scientific exegesis. But he insists that exegetes must be persons of prayer, sensitive to the liberating action of the Spirit, standing on the side of the "little ones," and willing to listen to and learn from them. As they go about their task in the context of life and the church, "the church born from the people," their exegetical work will be enriched and their contribution enhanced.

I believe that the insights coming from this experience of reading the Bible in Brazil have a great deal to offer to North American Christians. As we enter into the reflection coming out of the base communities and follow their method, we too may hear a disturbing message we never heard before. And the challenge here presented to biblical scholars could open new vistas among us as well.

RICHARD SHAULL  
Swarthmore, PA

Recinos, Harold J., *Hear the Cry! A Latino Pastor Challenges the Church*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 156. \$11.95.

Readers will find this book to be a lament, a protest, a poignant description of life in the urban ghetto, and a story of personal and collective triumph over the worst forms of adversity. It is also persuasive evidence that what one learns in seminary, namely, a historical-critical understanding of the Bible, particular insights from Latin American liberation theology, understanding of and commitment to a



congregation, and direct social involvement in the life of the whole community can revitalize a dying church, even in the poorest and most discouraging barrios of the inner city.

Recinos, a United Methodist minister, is now Assistant Professor of Ministry and Parish Development at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. He knows the urban situation, and what he says about life in the ghetto he experienced as a child of the streets, a victim of drugs, poverty, and marginalization. But he is a persuasive exhibit of how in certain situations persistent Christ-like love can uncover and transform the most unlikely persons.

This book is a literary tapestry in which narrative theology, poetry, social and historical analysis, biblical exegesis, and liberation themes are skillfully woven together. The poetic verses that introduce each chapter are, to use Wordsworth's phrase, "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." The anger and anguish Recinos feels as a Latino for those whom he calls "the invisible members" of our society, this burgeoning percentage of "the working poor, the underemployed, and the chronically unemployed," pulsate throughout the book. But *Hear the Cry!* is not a frenzied assault. It is a prophetic call to the whole church to grasp the true dimensions of evangelism and the possibilities of congregational renewal. Recinos is impatient, and rightly so, with an evangelism that substitutes "saving souls for Jesus" for "seeing, acting, and reflecting" on the demoralizing effects of the social, economic, and spiritual misery experienced by the Latino community in the United States. He writes not as an observer or a victim, but as a prophetic participant.

While a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York in the early 1980's, Recinos was appointed pastor of the Church of All Nations, a parish located in New York's East Side, a congregation with a rich heritage but dismal future. The Church was, in fact, almost dead. The building was dilapidated, and the congregation was reduced to eight frightened and discouraged people who, except for monthly infusions of funds from the outside to support a pastor, would long since have given up and disbanded. There was hardly a visible spark to fan. By confronting some urgent problems head-on, then linking theological growth with social analysis, guiding the small group to agree on four specific goals, and working for community as well as personal and congregational renewal, the vision of Ezekiel (37:1-10) was repeated in this small parish. Renewal was not immediate; it was incremental. Along with progress there were setbacks and failures.

This is a brief but wide-ranging book in which the author describes the impact of U.S. foreign policy on Puerto Rico and of U.S. national policy on Puerto Ricans. He notes the unfortunate contribution of Protestant missionaries to the denationalization of Puerto Rico, and the political, economic, and psychological issues faced by Puerto Ricans both on the island and the U.S. mainland.

One could quibble over two or three details, but these do not detract from the major value of the book. Recinos has grasped the potential of historical evangelical faith and applied it to a concrete situation. Those who want to see their parishes

come alive will do well to read carefully and ponder the implications of what he so movingly describes.

ALAN NEELY

Princeton Theological Seminary

Meeks, M. Douglas. *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. Pp. 257. \$12.95.

This is a book, lest the title mislead the reader, about God's economy, not about human economics. The author suggests *Oikonomia* as a biblical, yet appropriately modern, metaphor for the character and work of God. It is more adequate, he believes, than metaphysical images of self-sufficiency or monarchical images of political power, because it emphasizes interpersonal community in the divine being as well as the care and responsibility of God for the whole of creation and human community. The starting point for human economics becomes, therefore, the overflowing righteousness and love of God providing abundantly for his people, reaching out for the poor, transforming the human economy from an exclusive competitive model whose goal is everlasting material growth—property rights, exchange of scarce goods, and exploitation of human work—to a model of livelihood for all, aimed at deepening human capacities to live, serve, and participate in the democratic culture of transformed community.

All of this is set against what Meeks believes to be the false faith and destructive practice of the science of economics and the market economy, which depend on hidden God-concepts that emphasize mastery, domination, and irresponsible power. This is transferred to the free individual in a competitive world and undergirds exclusive property rights and the impersonal laws of production and exchange, including the treatment of labor in the market. A self-sufficient, arbitrary, omnipotent God is here presupposed who "elects and determines according to an atomistic sovereignty." The market human being as "owner of the world" reflects this deity in his drive for domination and control through "rational utility maximization."

The argument is substantive; so is the book. Its extensive notes and bibliography, which reflect the scope and variety of the author's scholarship, are worth exploring in themselves. Meeks has taken a neglected metaphor—that of the household of creation and of the people of God in history—and has projected it convincingly into twentieth-century theological ethics. We are all in his debt for this.

This having been said, the book's argument is littered with unclear ideas and unsolved problems. To begin with God: it is certainly right to emphasize the dynamic relational reality of God over against the aseity and impassability of some Greek absolute. It is right to express this in trinitarian terms. But this is not new.

Augustine fought the battle in his own soul centuries ago. It was the heart of the teaching of the Reformation. It has dominated the theological revival of the twentieth century, both biblical and systematic. These predecessors guarded the concept, however, against sentimental idealism far more effectively than the author has done. The authority of God in a sinful world tends, for him, to be dissolved in the trinitarian economy. Along with God the monarch, God the judge is obscured.

Second, Meeks finds a false God behind all the operations of economies as science and the free market as an agency. His argument is, however, analogous to witch hunting. He does not quote or identify in the thought of economists and businessmen (with one egregious exception: Andrew Carnegie) the theology he attributes to them. There is not an honest dialogue with economic liberalism or the free-enterprise style going on here. This reviewer happens to think that many of Meeks' criticisms are well taken, but they need to be expressed with much more care and balance. An example is his identification of the four basic components of political economy: power/rule, property, work, and need/consumption. What he forgets is what every economist would claim is basic: the production of goods and services using raw materials, skills, and technological know-how. Economics is a form of human relations, but it differs from other forms in mediating them through the production and distribution of material things. How this is best promoted, controlled, and imbued with some relative justice in a sinful world is the problem of economic science. Questions of the balance between political authority and the market system in giving just and humane direction to this work will not go away, even if God is everywhere recognized as the supreme Economist. Meeks has left us to apologize to the economists for demonizing their profession and to work with them on these problems.

Finally this book, despite its creativity, is curiously isolated from the work of the church in this field over the past 100 years. The social gospel movement is not mentioned. The broad ecumenical tradition in economic ethics, fed by theologians such as William Temple, Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner, Paul Lehmann, and many others, is also ignored, as is the whole Roman Catholic tradition in modern economic ethics, from *De Rerum Novarum* in 1890 to the present. Despite a bow in the direction of Latin Americans, the one modern theologian with whom Meeks interacts is Jürgen Moltmann. The bibliography and the notes are heavily concentrated on works which have appeared since about 1980. The lively interaction between Christian thought and Marxist socialism, from the early years of Marx on down, is only barely mentioned. The author has given us many ideas which were developed in the generations before him in slightly different form, but there is no dialogue. One wishes he discerned more clearly the shoulders on which he stands.

CHARLES C. WEST  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Wogaman, J. Philip. *Christian Moral Judgment*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 192. \$14.95.

In 1976 the Dean of Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington published a useful book which proposed a way for Christians to make moral judgments by utilizing rational deliberation in a modest way. The key idea in that book was the concept of presumption—an outlook which depended upon taking certain foundations for choice as valid unless there was a serious countervailing reason to do otherwise. With that concept the author moved adroitly between the claim of moral perfectionists to have the right Christian solutions to particular issues and the assertion of the situationalists and realists that moral judgments are almost totally contextual and relative to the particularities and circumstances in which they are made. Dean Wogaman delineated five positive, two negative, and five polar (or dialectical) presumptions by which to judge moral choices. Like the classic book by Reinhold Niebuhr, *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, this 1976 book by Wogaman used the indefinite article in its title, describing itself as *A Christian Method of Moral Judgment*. (For a more detailed summary of that book, see Edward L. Long, Jr., *A Survey of Recent Christian Ethics*, pp. 12-14.)

That book by Wogaman has provided a very helpful resource across the subsequent years for demonstrating the continuing value of moral deliberation in Christian decision-making. Wogaman's book has reminded us that thoughtful balance embodied in limited claims and driven by morally earnest reasoning is a compelling option for those who are uneasy with the ideologically purer alternatives offered us in the effort to sharpen the distinction between Christian and non-Christian ways of making moral choices.

This new work, from the pen of the now professor of Christian Social Ethics at Wesley, contains in a revised form all except the first and last chapters of its predecessor. It is a somewhat more theoretical/theological treatment. In place of one opening chapter which discusses the problem of ethical uncertainty as experienced in the seventies, the revised version has two opening chapters. The first of these examines some theological warrants for Christian decision-making; the second, the role of the moral agent in action. These two chapters provide an enriched theoretical framework for those chapters which follow—all of which are very similar to the central part of the earlier edition, except that the role of biblical materials has been given added attention.

In place of a concluding chapter which draws out specific strategic and social implications of the method advocated by Wogaman, the new edition has a very brief concluding statement which declares the importance of linking reflection (deciding) with action (being and doing). Although this change overcomes the references to particular events and issues which tended to make the first version time-bound, it renders this new edition less useful as an introduction to a field that underplays social particularities only at risk to its integrity and relevance.



The new title is simpler, but it lacks an important nuance present in the old one. Overall, however, Wogaman has updated a sober, thoughtful, treatment of Christian moral decision-making. It should prove as helpful as its predecessor as a guide to our thinking in the years ahead.

EDWARD LEROY LONG, JR.  
Drew University

Suzuki, David & Peter Knudston. *Genethics: The Clash between the New Genetics and Human Values*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. Pp. 384. \$25.00.

The authors of *Genethics*, one a geneticist and the other a science writer, in searching for a suitable ethical framework for regulating the new genetics avoided theology as an interpreter of the place of these discoveries in human history. Their descriptions of both the intricacies and grandeur of our genetic makeup invoked for this reviewer an omnipotent, omniscient, creator God who gave us the wonders of this world and its inhabitants to treasure and cherish.

It appears that in offering their tenth genetic principle that a new mythology is needed which will create "... an abiding sense of awe and humility toward all biological systems, whose stunning complexities continue to outstrip our richest imagination" (p. 350), the authors have eschewed Judeo-Christian theology as a usable framework. They lobby instead for the development of cross-cultural ethical principles which are constantly evolving since it is "impossible to know at this point what moral maps are necessary."

This book purports to raise questions concerning the ethics of the new genetics. In fact its "genethics" statements at the beginning of each chapter are more guidelines for scientists than the development of an ethical framework or set of values for decision-making in genetics.

It is questionable if some of the "genethic principles" would qualify as ethics per se. One of these principles states, "Genetic diversity, in both human and non-human species, is a precious planetary resource, and it is in our best interest to monitor and preserve that diversity." Human diversity is a form of evolution. Since there are too many variables affecting genes, geneticists simply cannot monitor them. Artificial selection chooses certain hereditary traits based on what we designate as good or bad. This manipulation reduces genetic diversity with an eye for short-term goals instead of long-term consequences. Selecting out traits which seem desirable in one moment of history is dangerous.

Although we can applaud the desirability of diversity and even from a scientific perspective recognize the increased vulnerability to disease and the loss of future traits that uniformity creates, is this an ethical principle? The authors clearly point out the disadvantages of inbred corn, but its sinister nature is unclear.

Their nine genethic principles are more statements about the lessons of heredity



and human experience, the dangers of self-illusion in manipulating genes, and the importance of establishing boundaries in genetic engineering.

Although the authors claim this book is readily accessible to the lay reader, for those educated in the humanities the repeated need of the glossary belies this claim. However, many of the passages in this book are very well written and contain fascinating insights for the novice scientist. For example, their description of six types of maize and the glory of diversity of that plant is illuminating. "Popcorn, as we all know, possesses kernels—hard shelled, angular and moist—that explode inside-out at high temperatures, turning into the crunchy puffed snack we associate with movie theaters" (p. 293). In discussing the multicolored corn, worshipped by ancient Indians, the authors describe a symbiosis with nature for which we might long. They suggest the corn's glorious colors may have resulted from its gratitude for the extraordinary love which the Indians lavished on it.

The book's almost four hundred pages are chuck full of information invaluable for the lay reader's appreciation of the world of genetics. One such fascinating chapter is "Dance of the Genes" (p. 55), which describes how "... the vast majority of genes on this planet dance to the universal score of the central dogma."

The final chapter contains a very useful summary of the benefits and possible abuses of applied genetics. Among the benefits are: new diagnostic tests and treatments for hereditary disorders; insights into mechanisms of genetic mutation and biological inheritance; and clarity about the evolutionary history of our species. (Regarding the latter, one disquieting fact for some creationists may be the statement that ninety-nine percent of the chemical information stored in human DNA is indistinguishable from that of chimpanzees and gorillas!)

The book consistently raises a note of caution about the impact of genetic engineering: "... any discussion of the potential risks of agriculture genetic engineering is necessarily speculative as are most confident assurances that no risks exist at all" (p. 281). It is not the risks, however, which are of greatest concern to the authors but rather the accompanying *hubris* that the human genome project may create. In other words, a false sense of scientific mastery over our species' genome. "If we choose to ignore the still-staggering limitations to our knowledge of human inheritance—preferring instead convenient illusion—we could easily fall prey to a most dangerous human folly. DNA sequences in hand, we could find ourselves sliding down a slippery slope toward that perilous state of mind that is a mix of bloated human pride and self-confidence that ancient Greek thinkers referred to as *hubris*."

The authors conclude that the business of science is to systematically dissect nature into manageable bits and pieces. However, science has built-in limitations with but fragmentary information about the world. Technology is neither good nor evil but must be guided by ethics and informed by values. The most important virtue highlighted here is humility, a welcome note from the framers of our brave new world.

ABIGAIL RIAN EVANS

National Capital Presbytery Health Ministries

Garrett, Susan R. *The Demise of the Devil: Magic and the Demonic in Luke's Writings*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. Pp. 179. \$16.95.

This monograph, written by an alumna of Princeton Seminary who is presently assistant professor of New Testament at Yale Divinity School, studies passages in Luke and Acts that deal with Satan, demons, and magic. After an introduction that outlines her approach, Garrett first describes in general terms the role played by magic in the Greco-Roman world, then surveys previous studies on the relation between magic and the New Testament. The approach of this first chapter is sociological, but that of the body of the book, which consists of a study of the Lukan texts, is mainly "literary," i.e., it aims to derive Luke's intention from an analysis of the "narrative world" of his text. One chapter is devoted to three passages in the Gospel, Luke's narrative of Jesus' temptation by Satan (Lk. 4:1-13), of his dispute with the Jewish leaders over whether or not he casts out demons by the power of Satan (11:14-23), and of his cryptic statement that he has seen Satan fall from heaven like lightning (10:17-20). Subsequently, three chapters treat important passages in Acts in which Christian disciples are contrasted with the magicians Simon Magus (Acts 8:4-25) and Bar Jesus (13:4-12) and with seven Jewish exorcists, the sons of Sceva (19:8-20). A concluding chapter sums up the results and attempts to relate them to the concerns of Luke's community. Garrett's basic thesis is that it is central to Luke's purpose to present Jesus as disarming Satan by his death and resurrection and thereby rendering ineffective the magic practiced by the devil's envoys.

This study draws together in a helpful way Luke's scattered presentations of Jesus' victory over Satan, demons, and, through his disciples, magicians. Garrett analyzes the Lukan passages with the analytic clarity and the attention to detail that is necessary to establish her thesis. It could have been strengthened even further had she made stronger connections between Luke's portrayal of the demonic opposition to Jesus and the church, on the one hand, and his depiction of the general Jewish and pagan opposition (not just that of the magicians), on the other. Even in its present form, however, her work stands as a salutary corrective to the overly rationalistic picture of Luke one might receive from some modern studies. Some of the ways in which the author uses data about ancient magical practices to illuminate Luke's narrative, moreover, are fascinating. She shows, for example, that ancient necromancers often invoked the spirits of people who had suffered violent deaths, and she speculates that this practice may have been part of the reason that magicians such as those pictured in Acts were so eager to exploit the name of Jesus and that early Christians were so concerned to refute accusations of sorcery.

While I found myself agreeing with most of the conclusions Garrett reached, upon occasion it seemed to me that she forced the evidence in order to make Luke appear more consistent (and more literary!) than he actually is. For example, while it is *generally* true that in Luke's mind it is Jesus' death and resurrection that rings the death knell for Satan, I do not think that is the immediate import of Luke 10:17-20, in which Jesus relates his disciples' authority over the evil spirits to his own

vision of the fall of Satan from heaven. The story is set in Jesus' earthly ministry and seems to hint that already at that point Satan is in some way cast out. I also missed in Garrett's monograph a more serious engagement with the hermeneutical questions raised by her interpretation of Luke. While she has well demonstrated that Luke's point in telling his tales of supernatural one-upmanship is to show that in Jesus "all magic was dissolved," to use the terms of Ignatius (*Eph.* 19:3), the effect of her monograph on a modern reader is apt to be exactly the opposite, i.e., to suggest that Luke's narrative is thoroughly shot through with "magical" features. What does such mythological language say to us today, if anything? An engagement with this question is especially a desideratum in a work which, from its tone, seems to be pitched not only to scholars but also to educated lay people, some of whom—such as the readers of this journal—will no doubt have a more than antiquarian interest in Luke's message.

JOEL MARCUS

Princeton Theological Seminary

Rensberger, David. *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1988. Pp. 168. \$14.95.

Generally speaking, Johannine scholarship tends to fall into one of two distinct types. One type emphasizes the literary and metaphorical qualities of the Fourth Gospel in its present form: Here interest is devoted especially to the complex interaction of its images and metaphors, to the ironic turns of its plot, and to the exalted and elusive portrayal of its majestic Christ. The other type of scholarship emphasizes the concrete historical issues posed by the Gospel: Who wrote the Fourth Gospel, and to whom was it written? What kinds of experiences were the first readers undergoing, and how did the writer interpret those experiences? Has the Fourth Gospel been subjected to editorial revision or redaction, and how might such revisions help to shed light on the historical situation of the Johannine community?

Unfortunately, however, these two types of Johannine scholarship are usually carried out quite independently of each other. Seldom are the two methodological approaches brought into serious dialogue with each other. Perhaps part of the reason for this lack of integration is the tendency of these two approaches to yield very different kinds of results in their specific application. Often the historical analysis of the Fourth Gospel results primarily in an increased distance between the Gospel and our own world. The more clearly we understand the historical context of John, the stranger it appears to modern eyes. Conversely, studies of symbol, literary strategy, and metaphor in the Fourth Gospel often result in an experience of greater immediacy in reading the Fourth Gospel. But at the same time, one senses at times that such readings of the Gospel result in a strangely disembodied theology or spir-

ity, divorced from the ebb and flow of the historical existence of specific believers.

This book is a bold attempt to break down this dividing wall between ancient history and contemporary theology. Fully historical in his approach, Rensberger recognizes that Johannine Christianity in the first century was essentially sectarian in character. Johannine Christians had turned away from the world and identified themselves over against the world which they viewed as hostile to God.

This perspective on Johannine Christianity is not new with Rensberger. Most Johannine scholars have been singularly unattracted to this Johannine sectarian vision, and have therefore found little use for John's dualistic conception of church and world. Rensberger, however, suggests that it may be precisely this "over-againstness" which the Church needs today. He writes: "It is characteristic of Johannine sectarianism that it calls for a choice, and not merely a private one to be made in the comfort of one's own home. The choice is between God and the world, the world which reacts with violence and oppression against God and God's messenger; and it is a public choice, to be made in the discomfort of social exposure. It is precisely Johannine Christianity's nature as a sect that enables it to present that choice with radical clarity as a radical demand" (p. 143).

Rensberger thus joins his voice with a number of other scholars and theologians to suggest that the time may have come for an ecclesiology which takes a more antithetical posture to the prevailing culture than has been assumed in the past. One senses the resonances with Walter Brueggemann's plea for the exile as model for the church, or with Stanley Hauerwas' and William Willimon's provocative book, *Resident Aliens*. Rensberger's study challenges the ease with which we inhabit the city of God and the human city at the same time.

Rensberger's constructive approach to Johannine history and theology enables him to make some striking suggestions for the wedding of personal faith and decision with political involvement, critique, and change. Time and again he points out the way in which, for the Fourth Gospel, the individual choice for Jesus is a choice with profound social and political ramifications.

This may well be one of the most theologically useful books to emerge from Johannine scholarship in the last decade. Highly recommended.

JAMES BROWNSON

Western Theological Seminary

Theissen, Gerd. *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*. Trans., John P. Galvin. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. Pp. 433. \$37.95.

Originally published as *Psychologische Aspekte paulinischer Theologie* in 1983, this book seeks to supplement historical criticism and traditional methodologies of interpreting ancient texts: "It seeks not to replace but to deepen the tested historical-critical methods" (xii).



Gerd Theissen, professor of New Testament at the University of Heidelberg, has previously written about the social world of the New Testament in general, and I Corinthians, in particular. Most of this earlier work has been descriptive, opening many new insights into the situation of the Corinthian church, i.e., that they were a diverse social group. Theissen interpreted many of the problems in the Corinthian church to be a result of social differences.

His present book falls into six divisions. Part One, "Theoretical Problems of Psychological Exegesis," summarizes, clearly and concisely, the three disciplines of psychology utilized in the book: learning theory (chapter 1), the psychodynamic approach (chapter 2), and the cognitive approach (chapter 3). A fourth chapter deals with problems involved in seeking to integrate these three approaches. Part Two is entitled "The Secrets of the Heart: The Disclosure of Unconscious Motives Through Pauline Theology," and discusses I Cor. 4:1-5; 14:20-25; Rom. 2:16. Part Three, "The Veil of Moses and the Unconscious Aspects of the Law," treats II Cor. 3:4-4:6. Part Four examines "Law and Sin: Raising the Conflict to Consciousness According to Romans 7:7-23." In part Five, "Glossolalia—Language of the Unconscious?" the author interprets I Cor. 12-14. Part Six is entitled "Wisdom for the Perfect as Higher Consciousness: 1 Corinthians 2:6-16." The book concludes with a brief epilogue, "The Effects of the Pauline Preaching in Transforming Behavior and Experience." A fairly extensive bibliography and indexes conclude the book.

His definition of psychological exegesis (basic to understanding his intent and approach) is "all attempts to interpret texts as expression and occurrence of human experience and behavior" (p. 1). The methodology used is eclectic, being influenced by several different individuals and "schools." Especially influential is Hans Thomae's "synthesis of humanistic and modern theoretical approaches in psychology" which served as a model for Theissen's book. Many other influences are mentioned in his preface but Theissen does his own unique synthesis in applying variously understood "psychological theories to religious texts and phenomena" (xi).

To find a book on Biblical studies with "psychology" in the title often evokes immediate suspicion. Many uses of psychology in exegesis have produced poor and inadequate exegesis by importing back into the ancient texts modern categories or, worse, the exegete's own personal problems. Psychologically influenced exegesis tends to be foreign and contradictory to the Biblical materials.

Theissen is certainly not the first to utilize aspects of psychology in exegesis. Much of the twentieth century has seen interpreters appropriate theories from psychology for use in Biblical studies. Paul's conversion, Job's experience, and Jesus' own self-consciousness have all been combed in light of psychology. Much of this has been naive, speculative, and reductionistic, often falling short in both psychological theory and Biblical studies.

To the degree that one can effectively use various aspects of modern psychology to gain additional insights into Paul and his thought, Theissen has done it. The degree, however, to which he has succeeded will be debated. Theissen is most vul-



nerable in regards to his "hermeneutical integration." He employs what "works" for his own purposes and will therefore appear arbitrary, pragmatic, and reductionistic.

Few will find Theissen easy reading. The arguments are closely reasoned and draw from many areas of religious thought. The acquaintance one has with psychological interpretation in this century will determine the level of difficulty. Professors and students will likely make use of selected readings from the book to supplement courses in Pauline studies, especially in Romans and the Corinthians letters. Those interested in keeping current with methodologies being used in interpreting the New Testament will benefit from reading chapter 4. Pastors will find various sections especially useful for pastoral theology and counseling and in mediating new insights of certain texts to their congregations.

RONALD L. TYLER  
Pepperdine University

Kee, Howard Clark. *Knowing the Truth: A Sociological Approach to New Testament Interpretation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989. Pp. 120. \$8.95.

A prolegomenon to a promised New Testament theology, *Knowing the Truth* argues that theological interpretation of the New Testament should employ the insights of sociological and social historical studies of early Christianity. In this short programatic work, Kee asserts that, since Christianity is communal and not individualistic in nature, a social approach to the New Testament, emphasizing its placement and meaning in the terms of its own historical-cultural context, will be truer than traditional exegesis to the knowledge (and forms of knowing) advocated by the various New Testament writings. The first half provides useful though simplified overviews of important philosophical, anthropological, and social scientific materials. The roles of philosophers of science in challenging common views of knowledge and "fact" are reviewed (Kuhn, Ludwik Fleck, *et al.*); major figures of sociology and anthropology are introduced (Durkheim, Weber, Geertz, Douglas); and recent attempts to apply such methods to biblical studies are briefly evaluated (Malherbe, Meeks, Judge, Theissen, among many others). The survey of different approaches, especially chapter two, may be tedious, as many theorists are paraded quickly, often with the briefest summary of their approaches and without explicit indication of their usefulness for New Testament studies. These chapters, however, furnish an entre into the field and therefore may be the most helpful part of the book for many. Chapter 3 consists of a listing of questions (with no attempt at answers) that Kee believes a sociological approach will ask. The questions are important, but the chapter is more an outline for a proposed study than a study itself. Chapter 4 is more substantial, proposing, again briefly, how the category of "covenant" could be used to organize New Testament theology.

*Knowing the Truth* is a proposal and should not be read—or judged—as an actual

study in its own right. A glaring question left unanswered, however, is the connection between the methodological chapters and the proposal that "covenant" should be the theme of a New Testament theology. It is hard to see how the latter material is "sociological"; it looks like a traditional theological analysis (which Kee rejects), differing only in the choice of "covenant" as the central theological concept. How will "covenant" illumine issues of class and status, social networks, boundaries, the socio-political formation and reinforcement of hierarchy, distribution of honor, distribution of goods, or other typically sociological questions?

Besides these disappointed expectations, readers should be alerted to a certain discrepancy between Kee's theoretical statements and his rhetorical practice. Far too frequently Kee dismisses some other approach (individualistic, theological approaches, structuralism, deconstruction, Marxism) only by stating that it imposes on the NT text alien categories of thought instead of simply allowing the texts to speak in their own terms and categories. "Reductionists," "abstractionists," and "formalists" all force onto the text, according to Kee, foreign meanings; they do so simply because, one must assume, they are unwilling or unable to do what Kee seems to be able to do: simply "read" the text. Of course, it would be a surprise to structuralists to know that their approach is "obviously an intellectualistic ploy for escaping the text and its context" (p. 61). Perpetrators of the history-of-religions school also force the biblical text into strange categories "which derive not from the documents themselves" (p. 72; see also pp. 74-75, 103, 106). Kee is here indulging in a popular rhetorical ploy: he asserts that other interpreters "read into" the text their own ideas, whereas he and those with whom he agrees are not such active interpreters, merely "discovering" what is in the texts themselves. The former are active, indeed coercive, construers of meaning (thereby missing the "true" meaning of the text itself); the latter are passive receivers of meaning (thereby preserving the "true" meaning of the text itself).

This rhetorical move is especially surprising given Kee's repeated insistence that all interpreters occupy "symbolic universes" that are socially, and therefore contingently, construed. We all see everything only through the stained glass of communal "shared assumptions" (p. 103, see also pp. 6, 10, 13, 22, 27, 29). There is no "objective" observer, and the very meaning of "fact" has significantly shifted. In light of these important ideas, Kee's regular appeal to the "text itself" and his assurance that the interpretations of others are "reductionistic" (that is, they reduce the phenomenon to something of their own making rather than getting to the "essence" of the thing) appear self-contradictory—or at least look like attempts to short-circuit rather than engage argument.

With these caveats in mind, one may recognize the strengths of Kee's prolegomenon. It provides a useful survey of relevant material; it issues a salutary call for the social contextualization of New Testament writings; and it challenges problematic assumptions of traditional historical criticism (e.g., the far too easy Judaism-Hellenism dichotomy that has ruled much New Testament interpretation). The book

gives some sense of the direction Kee will take in his New Testament theology; we must await that work to evaluate the extent to which his theoretical proposals will offer a truly new biblical theology.

DALE B. MARTIN  
Duke University

Miller, Jr., Patrick D., Paul D. Hanson, and S. Dean McBride, eds. *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987. Pp. i-xxv + 672. \$44.95.

This impressive volume of essays in tribute to eminent Harvard biblical scholar Frank Moore Cross is a wonderful resource for those who wish to set the history and religion of ancient Israel in its ancient sociocultural context. Divided into two sections, "Sources and Contexts" and "History and Character," it contains essays by such noted scholars as Thorkild Jacobsen, David Noel Freedman, William G. Dever, Roland Murphy, Helmer Ringgren, George Mendenhall, and Norbert Lohfink, to name just a few of the internationally recognized authorities, as well as exciting contributions by a variety of other scholars whose work is not yet as well known. Representation across Jewish and Christian, international, as well as gender lines is also excellent and well-balanced, making this a fine representative volume of the "state of the art" in research in Hebrew Bible today.

As might be expected in any volume dedicated to Cross, who is known for his epigraphic, cross-cultural as well as theological/historical interests, many of the essays have a decided ancient Near Eastern "flavor" and make use of the wide variety of archaeological and epigraphic evidence now available for the reconstruction of ancient Israel's history, culture, and religion. In the first section, "Sources and Contexts," space is devoted to the exploration of the impact of the cultures surrounding Israel on that community's religious sensibilities. Insights drawn from the study of Mesopotamia, Mari, Ugarit, Phoenicia, Aram-Damascus, Canaan, and the Transjordan are all related to various aspects of Israelite religious development, with respect to both those elements which Israel borrowed or adapted (such as the sacrificial cult with its practice of animal sacrifice) and those which it specifically rejected. The heavy reliance on textual evidence and material culture in this more explicitly archaeological section acts to anchor the insights of the authors on far more solid, less conjectural ground than is sometimes the case in such reconstructions.

The second section, "History and Character," moves on to more explicitly historical and theological studies, spanning the time period of the early tribal league (Iron Age transition) to the Second Temple period. Attention is given to such topics as covenant, kingship, wisdom, cultic reform, and Apocalypticism, with helpful essays on the religion of Israel at critical junctures in its history or the history of the canon (early [tribal] Israel, monarchic Israel, early Postexilic, Persian and Second Temple periods). Abraham, David, Josiah, Job, Zerubbabel and Nehemiah each

merit their share of attention as noted scholars address various aspects of the portrayal of each, using a variety of literary, archaeological, social-scientific and historical-critical methods. Of particular interest are essays by Phyllis Bird ("The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus") which makes available in English important material for assessing the relative inclusivity or exclusivity of the Israelite tradition, and Helmer Ringgren ("The Marriage Motif in Israelite Religion") which studies the language of love as it is applied to Yahwah's relationship to the people.

If there is a criticism to be made of this volume (other than its price, which, while understandable for a hardback, may place it beyond the average book budget), it is that its heavy reliance on archaeological reconstructions and epigraphic evidence as the primary matrices for understanding Israel's religion is somewhat at odds with major trends in biblical scholarship. Many in the field at large are currently finding that literary methods provide an often neglected but fruitful entry point for an understanding of the biblical text (one might think of the *Overtures to Biblical Theology* series by Fortress as an example of the varieties of work being done by biblical literary critics). Gone are the days when biblical critics can naively assume that the texts before them reflect "historical truth" in any pure, unmodulated form. *Ancient Israelite Religion*, though skewed away from this growing sensitivity to the problematic status of the text as literature, stands as an important monument to the fruitful interdependence of a variety of methodologies for the reconstruction of religion in the biblical communities.

CAROLE R. FONTAINE

Andover Newton Theological School

Newsome, Carol. *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition*. Harvard Semitic Studies 27. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985. Pp. xi + 476 with 19 plates. \$34.95 (\$23.50 member).

The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice is preserved only in fragments, but it is a major Dead Sea Scroll which opens our eyes to the cosmic dimension of worship in the Qumran Community ("The image of the chariot throne do they [the angels] bless [which is] above the firmament of the cherubim ..." 4Q405). The present volume contains photographs of all known manuscripts, transcriptions, translations, a philological commentary, and a concordance to this document. Guided by the technique for re-positioning fragments developed by H. Stegemann of the University of Göttingen, Newsom, who teaches at Emory University, has improved the textual sequence for the Song of the Sabbath Sacrifice (compare her 1982 Harvard dissertation). The Hebrew text is transcribed faithfully; obvious errors are placed in the text and corrections are discussed in the commentary. The highest standards and methods are followed. Newsom publishes eight manuscripts from Cave IV, and two others, from Cave XI and Masada. The oldest manuscript is dated to 75-50 B.C.E.



Newsom correctly judges that the document was composed at Qumran, and that it originally contained songs for only the first thirteen Sabbaths of the year. All ten manuscripts contain songs for only these Sabbaths (why not all fifty-two?). The form of this "quasi-mystical" liturgical document is seen to be pyramidal, with the seventh song at the apex, and with songs six, seven, and eight as a separate upper pyramid. Content, rhetoric, and language combine to produce in the reader, the hearer, and the community "a sense of being in the heavenly sanctuary . . ." (p. 17). Unique features of this document are the references to angels as priests, princes, and chiefs.

Newsom is now preparing an improved text, translation, and introduction with notes for the Princeton Theological Seminary edition of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This interesting document is significant for the study of early Judaism (cf. many of the Jewish apocalypses, *Lives of the Prophets* 23, *Ladder of Jacob* 2:3) and earliest Christianity (compare "the war of heaven" in 4Q402 with Revelation; and the reference to [Melchi]zedek in 4Q401 with Hebrews). Now we have in addition to the Hodayoth formula ("I praise you, O Lord, because . . .") the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice formularic incipit ("Song of the sacrifice of the . . . Sabbath on the . . . of the . . . month . . .").

It is clear that Jesus inherited from early Jewish theology the developed concept of God as "king" and the concept of "the Kingdom of God." No document in early Judaism so frequently refers to God as "King" and his "kingdom" as the Song of the Sabbath Sacrifices. Note these excerpts: God "the king" (4Q400 li), "your kingdom" (4Q400 li), "your gl[or]ious kingdom" (4Q401 i), "the God of holiness . . . the King of holiness . . . his kingdom" (Masada ShirShabb 17-19), "the King of angels . . . exaltation of [his] kingdom . . ." (4Q403 l), "the glory of his kingdom . . . the angels of the King . . . the chiefs of the congregation of the King . . . praises of exaltation for the King of glory . . . the God of the elim, King of purity . . ." (4Q403 lii). Singularly important is 4Q405 23ii lines 10-11: "These are the chiefs of those wondrously arrayed for service, the chiefs of the realm of the holy ones of the King of holiness in all the heights of the sanctuaries of his glorious kingdom." Now we can dismiss the advice of New Testament scholars who urged us to contemplate that the church invented the concept of "the Kingdom of God." We are brought closer to the possible meanings behind Mark 1:14-15, which report that Jesus proclaimed the dawning of "the Kingdom of God."

JAMES H. CHARLESWORTH  
Princeton Theological Seminary

Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1988. Pp. 400. \$19.95.

Professor Bruce, now emeritus professor at the University of Manchester, has given us an excellent book on the canon of the Old and the New Testament. As



one would expect, it is scholarly and comprehensive, and is written with his accustomed clarity. Bruce handles his subject from a historical point of view; at the same time he also occasionally points to the theological and devotional consequences of the development of the Christian canon of Scripture.

First, the author sets forth the stages in which the books of each Testament came to be collected and then recognized as authoritative. He discusses how the Hebrew Scriptures came to be interpreted in the early Church, as pointing to the person and ministry of Jesus. In the case of the New Testament, canonical and apocryphal works were distinguished from each other in accordance with criteria of canonicity, namely apostolic authority, antiquity, orthodoxy, and catholicity. Here the reader will find thoughtful consideration of such pertinent questions as: Is there a canon within the canon? Have some of the writings originally included in the Bible outlived their usefulness, and could some further writings be added to it now? What insights does present-day canonical criticism reveal to us?

The book includes as appendices two previously published lectures given by Bruce, one dealing with "The 'Secret' Gospel of Mark," and the other, "Primary Sense and Plenary Sense." The former considers the text, brought to light by Morton Smith in the early seventies, which purports to be a hitherto unknown letter of Clement of Alexandria concerning a Gnostic gospel of Mark. The latter appendix analyzes the levels or stages of meaning found in Scripture, particularly the depth of understanding by New Testament authors of Old Testament passages.

All told, this book is the best treatment of the canon of both Testaments currently available in print today.

BRUCE M. METZGER

Princeton Theological Seminary

Hancock, Ralph C. *Calvin and the Foundations of Modern Politics*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989. pp. 221. \$26.95.

Ralph C. Hancock has written an interesting and exasperating book. The key focus of his attention is the nature of modernity, or more specifically, modern rationalism, which he believes cannot give "a full and fully rational account of itself" without reference to something beyond itself. "[O]ur concentration on the secular and rational cannot be understood without reference to a standpoint beyond (if not 'above') this world." Building on the Weberian school, Hancock maintains that "Calvin's interpretation of Christianity essentially mirrors the deep structure of modern 'rationalism'" (p. xiii). His program is to show that Calvin and modern rationalism, as "a method and means," are related to each other, while both are opposed to the classical understanding of reason as "the pursuit of the best way of life by nature" (p. x). The goal is "to render questionable [the] simple dichotomy between the secular and rationalistic and the religious and otherworldly" (p. xi).

The book consists of an introduction, two major parts, and a conclusion. The introduction deals with literature about Calvin and political theory, and gives Hancock's thesis. Part one is entitled "Calvin's Practical Teaching: Divine Glory in Human Action," part two "Calvin's Antitheology: Transcendence without Another World." The conclusion makes clear where Hancock's real interest lies: "Idealism, Materialism, and Legitimacy in the Modern Age."

Perhaps I should begin by stating that this is the response of a student of Calvin, not of political philosophy. This may explain both the interest and the exasperation. As nearly as a non-specialist can, I followed the political argument with much interest. It seems very appropriate, but hardly so novel as Hancock believes, to affirm that insofar as modern rationalism is a method and means, it is congenial to Calvin in a way that the classical notion of reason could not be. Hancock affirms that "Calvin's hostility to the flesh was not a hostility to the body but to hierarchy, to human rule according to the *purposes* of human reason—precisely, one might say, a hostility to Aristotle" (p. 166—emphasis mine). A Calvinist does not need convincing, though some modern secularists may, that the rationalism of the contemporary West does not have final meaning in itself. So far, so good.

However, the means by which Hancock arrives at his fairly accurate final conclusions about Calvin's thought are so peculiar that the Calvin specialist is tempted to wonder if Hancock has ever read Calvin himself and not just (selected!) Calvinists. A *few* of the more curious examples must suffice. Hancock speaks of Calvin's understandings of self-knowledge as "consciousness of absolute nothingness," while knowledge of God is "consciousness of absolute power" (pp. 21, 123). He claims to "demonstrate for the first time the intricate unity of Calvin's practical teaching with his theology and indeed, the rigorous internal unity of that theology itself" (p. 21). Strangely, Hancock says that "it is not obvious what significance 'outward worship' has for God or man"; . . . "Calvin seems to imply that the purpose of this outward worship is not religious but secular . . ." (p. 30). "Calvin's affirmation of the priority of individual belief over institutional authority could hardly be stronger" (p. 45). Again, the "notion of order as consciousness of absolute power is the unifying ground of Calvin's treatment of the order of creation (book 1) and his treatment of the fall and the restoration of order (books 2-4). . . . I suggest that this principle of order [as absolute power] is the central teaching or basic doctrine underlying the *Institutes*" (p. 161). But enough.

Hancock's book may be good as well as provocative political theory; it is definitely provocative theology! It suffices to add that Hancock consistently uses exclusive language; some of us may rejoice that he is concerned only with Calvin's doctrine of *man* in relationship to God as absolute power.

ELSIE MCKEE

Andover Newton Theological School

Lohse, Bernhard. *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986. Pp. 288. \$16.95.

Bernhard Lohse has contributed significantly to our understanding of Martin Luther with this book, a work which has appeal not necessarily for the Luther scholar, but for the pastor, the teacher, or the university or seminary student. This book is an excellent introduction to Martin Luther within the context of his time, to various theological issues which consumed Luther as he tried to sort out the manifold implications of justification by faith, and to various interpretations of Luther.

The book is divided into seven main headings: Luther's World, Questions Related to Luther's Life, Luther's Role in the Complicated Controversies of His Time, Luther's Writings, Aspects and Problems of Luther's Theology, The History of the Interpretation of Luther, and Editions, Scholarly Journals, Aids to the Study of Luther. Each of these chapters is divided into many subheadings, usually of one or two paragraphs in length. These subheadings are numbered, thus making the development of each chapter easy to follow, and also providing a quick reference tool when the book is used in the classroom (as I have done).

Anyone who has read Lohse knows that he masterfully demonstrates the development of theology within its historical context, and therefore constantly has a watchful eye for the relationship of history and theology, as well as the impact each has upon the other. That is no less true with this work, and the author well spells out the complicated life and times of Luther, and deals well with the many controversies in which Luther found himself engaged, incorporating everything from the controversy over the Lord's Supper to Luther's consent to the bigamy of Philip of Hesse.

However, Lohse keeps in constant focus the centrality of Luther as theologian. He knows the importance of noting that, regardless of the controversies, the problems, or the battles which raged around him, "Luther, in his attempts to resolve such problems, always functioned as a theologian. Neither his theology nor his practical application of theology to life recognized certain areas as being subject to their own laws. At the same time, however, he did not try to resolve questions in a biblicist way, that is, he did not use an individual biblical passage as a pattern for his suggested resolution of a problem (p. 79)."

Extremely helpful, this book could profitably be used in the undergraduate or seminary classroom as an introduction to Luther. As an introduction to such study, the final chapter of the book would be invaluable. It provides annotations on editions, scholarly journals, and aids to the study of Luther. This chapter, supplemented by a helpful select bibliography of works in English at the end of the book, will begin the serious student on his or her pilgrimage through the complicated life and thought of Martin Luther.

Such a task seems formidable and overwhelming when one considers the mag-

nitude of both the personality and the thinking of Luther, expressed in his voluminous writings, as well as the complicated social, political, and economic history of the sixteenth century. However, Lohse's book is an excellent guide for such a task, written by one who well understands both Martin Luther and the life and culture of the time in which Luther worked out and lived out his theology.

ROGER J. GREEN  
Gordon College

Wolf, James G. *Gay Priests*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989. Pp. 216. \$17.95.

The editor of this book is a married Catholic layperson and a sociological researcher at the University of Kentucky. In 1987, while with the University of Chicago National Opinion Research Center, he surveyed a self-selected group of Roman Catholic priests who identified themselves as homosexual in orientation. The majority of the sample of these priests were anonymous and responded to Wolf's survey through an informal network of gay priests. A survey instrument was answered by these priests and a final sample of 101 responses to the instrument is presented (the instrument and the cover letter that went with it is supplied in an appendix along with an exhaustive bibliography on homosexuality and the church). Because the survey does not adhere to the 'scientific' tenants of sociological research (the sample is small—there are about 57,000 Roman Catholic clergy in the United States—and the sample is self-selected), a helpful comparison of the survey questions is contrasted with an American Catholic-sponsored survey completed in 1970. Many of the questions of both surveys are the same, save ones concerning sexual orientation and activity, so a useful comparison is made.

Some of the results of the Wolf survey are significant and to my mind predictable. Gay priests love the church but are more than frustrated by the perceived hypocrisy and homophobia of the church hierarchy; the gay priests are pastorally and socially oriented yet feel lonely and cut off from the vast majority of those who populate the church, i.e., the laity; many find that celibacy is an ideal rather than a law that must be upheld; and, most importantly, the majority intend to remain in their vocation as priests. The survey also indicates that the respondents estimate that as many as fifty percent of ordained Roman Catholic clergy are homosexual, with a significant number of those priests (forty-one percent) sexually active at one time or another and some would be considered promiscuous. Other surveys estimate the number of homosexual clergy to be as low as twenty percent while others indicate it to be forty percent. Even some religious orders and dioceses implicitly acknowledge this issue by requiring HIV tests for admission to seminaries or prior to ordination. Overall, however, there seems to be a cover-up of the issue due to homophobia or consternation, as the hierarchy both in America and in Rome seems not to want to discuss the issue but rather falls back on what the priests consider



outdated and unrealistic doctrine that has more of a political motivation rather than a sensitive theological motivation.

Part II of the book consists of four essays written by four priests (whose identities are kept anonymous because of the realistic fear of church disciplinary reaction). These essays address the lonely and at times fulfilling secret life of the gay priest; the relationship between spirituality and personal intimacy; the fears of the gay priest ministering within a church hostile to clergy sexual expression (genital or otherwise); and a statement calling for further dialogue within the church on the subject of celibacy, sexual orientation, and sexual prejudice. Each of the essays are personal and sensitive. None of them are shrill or polemical as are many of the official essays on the subject by church representatives such as those of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. Each deserves a close reading.

This book is not a balanced discussion on the theological and psychological pros and cons of a subject on which good Christians can disagree. It assumes that homosexuality is a non-pathological variation of sexual orientation and expression. With this premise in mind and if even the conservative estimate of the number of gay priests is close to accurate, it is a helpful account of clergy alienation and ministerial attitudes. For a more balanced treatment of the subject the reader should consult Batchelor's *Ethics and Homosexuality*. Nonetheless, this book, along with others since the publication of McNeill's *The Church and the Homosexual*, forces the reader, whether the reader is homosexual or heterosexual in orientation, to take a closer look at human attraction and the ends rather than the means of that attraction. It seems to this reader that the issue is one of dignity and faithfulness in human relationships rather than sexual orientation. Promiscuity, sexual objectification, and such paraphilias as child sexual abuse (be they heterosexual or homosexual) constitute the real sin. The recent events in the Episcopal Diocese of Newark, N.J., seems to reveal a very real issue: Christian relationships require of us our faithfulness and our personal and loving investment. When loving and faithlessness collide, there is the potential for sinful living.

BRIAN H. CHILDS

Columbia Theological Seminary

Somervill, Charles. *Stepfathers: Struggles and Solutions*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 152. \$10.95.

Being a stepfather can be just as joyful and just as stressful as being a father, with added dilemmas and challenges: The new stepfather has dubious credentials for authority and trust; rivalries within the family are enhanced because the new man is an "outsider"; same for sibling rivalries when the stepfather brings his own children; the stepchildren have their own grief, anxiety, anger and/or other perplexity over being separated from their birth father, and even perhaps a previous stepfather; the stepfather role is a novel one, distinct from "father"—with overtones such as uncle, camp counselor, friendly confidant—but with none of this well defined by



culture or by the children's expectations; and, above all, there is not the evolved shared history on which to base a relationship and to weather the storms.

When Charles Somervill (now pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Post, Texas) became a stepfather, he began recording his encounters with these dilemmas and with his stepchildren in the form of narratives, a fictionalized account. He shared his accounts and his dilemmas with Herman D. Colomb, a psychiatrist (here listed as "editorial consultant"). "The book was written by taking real-life problems to Dr. Colomb and working with him toward alternative solutions" (p. 10).

These "solutions" are embedded in the narratives, which occupy most of the pages of this book, and in some concluding paragraphs which end each segment. The "solutions" tend towards strategies for management. There is a minimum of interpretation of unconscious processes and motives that might be at play in these situations. There is no theological reflection, and there are no explicit pastoral suggestions for how someone outside the family might helpfully intervene. The author emphasizes that the solutions are tested, that they "really do work." They probably do; there is reassuring and helpful advice here.

Perhaps just as risky as taking on parenting when you are not a "real parent" is undertaking a lengthy narrative when you are not a professional writer. The literary value of the narrative and its probing of character and relationship may resemble that of television scripts portraying the families of Bill Cosby or Roseanne Barr, with the same idealized dialogue, and with solutions delivered on schedule before the half-hour is up. Or perhaps the literary style resembles the case study verbatim for which it is a stand-in. In any case, the writing gamble was as worth taking as is the stepfathering gamble and conveys this aspect of the human dilemma more lucidly and helpfully than would have a more abstract rendering.

JAMES E. DITTES  
Yale University

Steere, David A. (ed.). *The Supervision of Pastoral Care*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 287. \$19.95.

Seward Hiltner, one of the fathers of the CPE movement, and certainly the most published, would have been pleased with this book. When Seward was a patient in our hospital, we used to talk about supervision and CPE. One of his refrains put to me directly was "Why don't you CPE supervisors do more writing?" Well Seward, David Steere, and a band of writers who know what they are talking about, have produced the first of its kind—a book about "the supervision of pastoral care," deeply rooted in the CPE tradition and yet up to date.

A CPE-type review of this book, however, must begin with a pointed critique—lifting up both weaknesses and strengths. Like our evaluations of our students, such a critique springs from our supervisor-type perceptions that there is usually a close relationship between weakness and strength in a given person or document.

This book's strength lies in its completeness. It is really more of a library on

pastoral supervision than a coherent treatise on supervision. Perhaps Seward Hiltner would have suggested calling it "A Preface to Pastoral Supervision." But this suggestion points to the weakness. Because it is an edited book, there is a disjointed and somewhat relative quality in writing. To my mind the book is better written than it is edited. The editor's chapters (4) are carefully documented and reflect his experience and idiosyncratic style. But his editing should have assisted the reader with an outline, and perhaps a re-numbering of the various chapters. He does this in his preface, so prospective readers are advised to check this carefully as few will give equal attention to each part and each chapter.

As a clinical supervisor working in a general hospital, I found Steere's opening three chapters the strongest aspect of the book. His final chapter on supervision for training supervisors in field education was equally strong; field education departments and "teaching church" arrangements will want to digest this material. Chapters 4-7 are excellent nuts-and-bolts assists for supervision from both sides of the supervisory dyad. Chapters 8-11 look at the process from different perspectives, and Darryl Tiller's "The Self As Instrument" was as good a single article on supervision as I have seen. Pastors working with teachers and volunteers will be guided by clear thinking in chapters 15 and 16. But the material on transference, gender issues, and passivity (chapters 12-14), while well presented, is largely introductory and should be considered such.

Every accredited CPE center should own this book, and selected chapters will be valuable for use with students. Supervisors will be pleased to see that such "old timers" as David Steere and George Bennett (to whom the book is posthumously dedicated) are balanced with the new blood of folk like Kathleen Ogden Davis and Barbara Sheehan. It would have been a fatal mistake to fall back too heavily on the "old boys" network.

Finally, I note a deficit in references to *The Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* (published annually by the North Central Region of A.C.P.E. and The Central Region of A.A.P.C.). This eleven-year-old journal, like the book being reviewed, makes a start at giving creative, systematic, and learned statements on the supervision of pastoral care, but readers of Steere's "The Supervision of Pastoral Care" should have been directed to the journal. Lest there be any doubt on the subject—this is an excellent piece of work. The most personal comment I can make is that I wish I had edited/written it!

DANIEL C. DEARMENT  
Presbyterian Medical Center of Philadelphia

Rowatt, Jr., G. Wade. *Pastoral Care with Adolescents in Crisis*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989. Pp. 168. \$12.95.

Any author who tackles the topic of pastoral care with adolescents in this day and age engages in a courageous enterprise at best. The complexity of the not-child, not-yet-adult phase of human development requires careful research and observa-

tion. The complicating factor of crisis experience generated by internal changes and external challenges make insights about pastoral care in this conundrum most welcome. Rowatt does a masterful job of sorting out the complexities of adolescent life experience, identifying the particular crises today's adolescents are facing, and offers invaluable suggestions about how to both care for and confront teenagers in the task of pastoral care.

Instead of research based solely on textbooks, Rowatt relies heavily upon interviews with teens and survey instruments sent to 250 pastors to draw conclusions about pastoral care with adolescents in crisis. From this data he is able to identify the ten areas where adolescents are most in need of pastoral intervention. With this data and these rankings, Rowatt embarks on a detailed and thorough analysis of the principles that guide pastoral care with this unique population.

One of the important contributions Rowatt makes to our understanding of adolescents is that adolescence is not a monolithic stage of human development. Adolescence is comprised of a set of three discreet phases which Rowatt lays out with great detail and discrimination. He covers not only the physical and emotional design of early, middle, and late adolescence, but also the spiritual needs of each sub-phase.

Rowatt's employment of Seward Hiltner's shepherding paradigm was not helpful until he identified six functional dimensions of shepherding that guide pastoral care with adolescents. In fact, the strength of Rowatt's book lies in the descriptive use of various treatment modalities. Rowatt does a masterful job of presenting an overview of each of those approaches and how they can be applied effectively in the actual care of adolescents. His emphasis on problem-solving and cognitive approaches to adolescents in crisis was well-placed. Throughout the book Rowatt makes helpful suggestions about how best to counsel with adolescents. On page 60, for example, he writes, "Generally speaking, one must be more deliberate, direct, and in control when interviewing an adolescent."

Rowatt is less effective in his treatment of pastoral care with adolescents from ethnic minority groups. The absence of any material that addressed the needs of these groups was disappointing given earlier indications in the book that he would be speaking to such needs.

The other area where Rowatt's discussion might have been strengthened was in the linking of theological insights with counseling technique. For example, Rowatt's statement that helping adolescents to think of alternatives is a way of bringing hope to bear on a situation was an effective linking of the theological construct of hope with the particular problem-solving strategy of exploring alternatives. However, Rowatt made only passing reference to the connection. I wish he had pursued the connections more; and done so in other theology-practice links.

In the final analysis, however, *Pastoral Care with Adolescents in Crisis* gives us a rich resource with which to care for a vulnerable population in our society's midst.

HOMER U. ASHBY, JR.

McCormick Theological Seminary

Rekers, George A. *Counseling Families*. Waco, Texas: Word, 1988. Pp. 211. \$12.99.  
Wynn, J. C. *The Family Therapist: What Pastors and Counselors Are Learning from Family Therapists*. Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1987. Pp. 320. \$16.95.

During the past 30 years, a major shift has taken place in the field of counseling, a shift that has changed the focus from individuals to relationships. No longer are the urges, conflicts, feelings, and cognitions that motivate individual behavior necessarily the primary focus of attention. Clinicians have begun to consider the relationships that bind people together. As a result, a whole new family therapy movement has been generated. Family therapists have begun to say that relationships generate problems, and the particular form of those problems is dictated by the nature of the particular problem interaction.

Family is obviously foundational to the Christian understanding of human existence. Relationship is the lifeblood that bears revelation up and carries it along through the pages of scripture and history. But from a more practical level, we are thrust constantly into the middle of relationships, called upon to evaluate and intervene, to bind up and shore up what is crumbling before us.

Two new books have appeared to help the Christian community understand the new perspective introduced by the family movement. Both authors are attempting to introduce the Christian reader to the new arena of family systems thinking that has slowly revolutionized the counseling business.

Families are complicated. Trying to pull apart the dynamics and understand the problems, let alone weave some sort of helpful response, can be very taxing. George Rekers wades into the choppy seas of relationship and attempts to bring order out of seeming chaos. Dealing with relationships is a messy business. Certainty is sacrificed from the beginning. Just when the counselor senses that the "true" problem has finally been framed, the issue seems to melt away only to reemerge in another cloak. Processes take precedent over content.

In dealing with the confusion of family, Rekers is most effective when he develops specifics as to how the counselor is to act with a family. His checklists are helpful, focusing the reader on specific issues that need to be seen. A delineation of what makes for a healthy family was most useful. But I also found myself distracted by constant inclusion of research. I'm not a researcher, I'm a counselor. Tell me what you'd do with this.

Unfortunately, I sensed that Rekers lost his way, leading the reader to become confused as to whether his book is a discussion of theological issues relating to sin, reconciliation, and wholeness, or a counseling manual delineating the steps to effective family interventions. He wanders into some tricky biblical areas and handles these a little more cavalierly than I feel comfortable doing (e.g. the husband's authority over wife).

Wynn takes a different approach. He presents a gallery of the most prominent



thinkers and innovators in the field of family therapy, men and women who have literally carved out a whole new system. He lines these people up, one by one, and explains their various systems, gives a brief biographical sketch, discusses his/her style of therapy emphasizing specific techniques, then makes suggestions as to how best to apply the style to the pastoral ministry.

Wynn's book is excellent as an overview of the whole field of family therapy. A reading of this volume will acquaint the minister with a potpourri of different people and techniques. Wynn's writing style is fluid and very understandable. It is left up to the reader to synthesize all of the theories and techniques presented into a workable counseling system.

Hopefully these two books will whet the appetites of all Christian counselors to explore more fully the wonderfully rich field of family dynamics and counseling. If anything, we should be leaders and innovators in the task of helping families function more effectively.

JAMES OSTERHAUS

Community Presbyterian Counseling Center  
Danville, California

Johnson, Susanne. *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989. Pp. 173. \$13.95.

Johnson's thesis is plain: Christian education should initiate people into participation in God's realm, in the context of the church, through the three formative activities of worship, instruction, and the praxis of justice and care.

Not plain at all are the genre of this work and its intended audience. If ever there was new wine bursting out of old wineskins, here it is.

The new wine is Johnson's revolutionary recovery of the tradition of lifelong Christian initiation. She outlines a network of processes and content which the church has experienced as effecting—or better, disciplining—the spiritual formation of the Christian. These include: spiritual guides and role models; dialogue and critical reflection; the administrative and political life of the congregation and the denomination; character training; apprenticeships in service and leadership; dramatic immersion into the scriptural story through liturgy; and many more.

The importance of these practices, which are quite traditional, has been obscured by novel psychological and pedagogical theories. Johnson is particularly critical of ego psychologies and cognitive-developmental readings of the life of faith. In this criticism she joins her voice to those of James Loder and Craig Dykstra; unfortunately she shares some of the same biases and blind spots as her former professors. However, Johnson offers a fuller construction of a viable educational program than either of them has done so far.

Here is the immense value of the book for those who guide congregations' educational efforts. The book is a mandate and a map for responding to the Christian



people's thirst for life in Christ. But I would not be telling the truth if I did not express here my strong conviction that these folks, to whom the book is ostensibly addressed, are the ones who need it least.

Congregational Christian educators dwell in an odd kind of ghetto. This ghetto's walls function to protect those *outside* them from destabilizing ideas. When a suggestion that might challenge our foundational assumptions comes along, we say, "Ah . . . this must have something to do with Christian education," so we toss it over the wall and forget about it. Business as usual continues in the rest of the church.

There is no single "bad guy" who does this tossing. The publisher makes a marketing decision, and imposes a limit of 200 pages. The author, faced with a publish-or-perish economic decision, complies; she slashes her scholarly arguments back to mere bulleted lists, and she sprinkles the prose with exclamation points. The bookstore places the attractive little paperback on a shelf far away from the important tomes on christology and ecclesiology. The journal editor assigns the review to an education professor.

What else can one say but "old wineskins," when one finds work of this quality whittled down, lightened up, and pitched to the sector of the theological ecology whom the church takes least seriously? The marginalization of Johnson's critique of educational practices follows the marginalization of the author herself at Southern Methodist University, where she serves as associate dean for community life after being denied tenure on the Perkins theological faculty.

Thus the curricula and the pedagogical practices of the seminaries themselves are effectively insulated from the prophetic message which Johnson bears (p. 137):

(T)he greatest challenge facing the Protestant Church today owes to the loss of an authoritative sense of its teaching office, along with the loss of the spiritual reference of its ministry overall. . . . (T)he predominating paradigm for ministry is a composite of therapeutic, managerial, and organizational development values. Until the church is clearer about spirituality as the heart of Christian ministry, then evangelism, teaching, and preaching will aim for little more than "church growth," perniciously understood as swelling the membership.

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